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SERMONS ON ST THÉRÈSE OF THE CHILD JESUS

SERMONS ON ST THÉRÈSE OF THE CHILD JESUS

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Vice Postulator General of the Cause of the Servants of God of the Order of Discalced Carmelites. Translated from the Italian by a RELIGIOUS OF THE SOCIETY OF THE HOLY CHILD JESUS

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SERMONS ON ST THÉRÈSE OF THE CHILD JESUS

SERMON I

ST THÉRÈSE'S MISSION

" In gloriam meam creavi eam !"—Isaias xliii.

Forty years ago, here in Rome, crowded with pilgrims come from all parts of the world to pay homage to the great Leo XIII, there might have been seen a characteristic group of people from Normandy. They, too, were on a pilgrimage to beg for the blessing of the Vicar of Christ. No one paid any special attention to them, lost as they were among the crowd, yet to God, who was guiding their steps from afar, they were of supreme interest.

They were three in number: a man, venerable in age and in appearance, of distinguished bearing, and his two beautiful young daughters; charming, pious girls, who were entirely absorbed by the purpose which had brought them to the Holy City.

The younger and more beautiful of the two seemed as though lost in her own thoughts. The

father watched her narrowly, marking every word and movement, answering her gently, almost anxiously, whispering kind words to her, and, lover-like, tenderly calling her "My Queen." The child was thoughtful indeed, for her father had brought her to Rome not for pleasure only, but on a real pilgrimage of faith.

She had come, above all, to see the Pope, and to speak to him, who has such great power, to tell him privately of her anxiety, and to beg of him the fulfilment of her heart's desire. She had come on this pilgrimage to plead for her vocation; an early and unusual call to which apparently insurmountable difficulties had arisen.

Thirty-eight years passed, and once again Rome was crowded with pilgrims—millions of souls come from every part of the world to see the Pope, who, in St Peter's, honoured and prayed to the little unknown pilgrim of 1887, now raised to the glory of the Altars of the Church under the name of Thérèse of the Child Jesus.

The hand of God is too clearly visible in this touching and surprising event for us to ignore either its consequences or the reasons for it.

In barely fifty years there has been unveiled a life, the glory of which can never be dimmed by time, and it is our duty to ask ourselves why God gave her to us. What great and wise reasons moved the divine mercy to give to our times this delightful poem, so simple yet so

sublime, which we call the life of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus? It is not enough to answer in a general way and to say that God must love us very much to draw from his Heart this new gift for souls; but, summing up the life of this little Saint and placing her amidst our own surroundings and among souls as they actually are to-day, we must find a reason for Thérèse's greatness and for God's purpose in thus magnifying her.

* * * * *

I do not exactly know how the world judges St Thérèse, nor do I wish to know. The world, the enemy of God, is apt to revile what it does not understand. It must be confessed that the judgement of many who read *The Story of a Soul*, that living portrait of Thérèse, is surprising. They shake their heads and simply say: "She is a child." Yes, a child, but a child who has an unaccountable effect on grown-up people, a child who confounds the old and the wise, a child whose charm has been felt in every walk of life; a child of whom we might say that though born within the lifetime of most of us she has outstripped us all on the way to heaven. How are we to explain this wonder?

It is explained when a false prejudice which deceives the greater number of men is removed. Men are always mistaken when they estimate and measure material, moral, and spiritual greatness by the same standard; that of external importance. Men are wrong when they consider that

to be necessarily great which strikes the senses, while on the contrary they undervalue all that is not outwardly grand. God himself has, as it were, striven in all ages to correct this false idea, and is ever showing us his own valuation of human worth, which is diametrically opposed to ours. During his whole life our Lord practised and preached insistently the doctrine that the humble and little ones of the earth are to be the greatest in the kingdom of God. St Thérèse confirms this truth anew.

Enduring greatness is not founded on external things, so liable to fail and change. True greatness has its roots within the immortal soul of man. God, who sees not as we see, who penetrates into the very essence of life, who knows all things, looks into the *soul* of man to determine whether he is to be accepted or rejected.

Now, among all divinely beautiful things, God loves simplicity; that virtue by which he identifies himself with the true and rejects the false.

It is not necessary to illustrate this attribute of God. The divine thoughts and words and actions are bright and clear as the heavens. His dignity is not lessened by the creation of the dust that we tread under foot, or the grass upon which the animals feed. His sovereign power stoops to these lowly things with the same wisdom as when he makes the sun to shine or scatters the stars across the heavens. Our first parents shared in this divine simplicity, but then sin came, the

first great falsehood, with the result that duplicity replaced simplicity within the human soul, and man endeavoured to hide from himself God's beautiful truth, and to substitute for it what was purely artificial and unreal. And so, when a man wishes to be true and to raise himself in the sight of God, he must first take his right place before his Creator, he must humble himself, rid himself of sin, and start life anew, endeavouring to imitate the great God who is sovereignly simple.

Except for the beautiful simplicity of children, we have on earth no conception of the divine simplicity, and therefore it was that when Jesus gave to the people the pattern of Christian perfection and laid down the condition for entrance into heaven, he took a little child and said, "Unless you become as little children you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Once more has God acted thus before the whole world. In the midst of us he has placed a child, wonderful in her humility and her simplicity, and has said to us, "Imitate her." This child is Thérèse of the Child Jesus.

We can all imitate her because there was nothing that was out of the common in her life, her actions, or her words. She was born of a good Catholic family where not only duty but virtue and holiness were held in honour. Thérèse was in her early years a lovely child, full of life, affectionate, delighting in beauty but still more

in goodness. At school she was intelligent and studious, and she grew up an accomplished, cultured girl, who loved amusement, who travelled, who studied music and painting, who had an intense love for flowers, for nature, for the sea, and for all God's beautiful works. But God himself was the Ideal for which she longed, and which made her turn away from even the innocent joys that the future held for her. What she desired as an anticipation of heaven was to consecrate herself to him in Carmel.

When Thérèse became a nun she was like any other Carmelite; she had no raptures, or visions, or revelations, strictly so called; she was not distinguished among her Sisters unless for her charm of manner and for the angelic smile which accompanied her every word and action. Indeed her life was so very ordinary that one Sister even wondered what in the event of her death they would say in her "necrology."[1]

Externally, then, there was nothing extraordinary about Thérèse, yet, nevertheless, there was in this wonderfully simple life, passed within the walls of her own home and amid the religious silence of Carmel, an accumulation of unusual interior graces; these she sweetly accepted, without attracting the attention of others. Indeed, she seemed unconscious of her gifts. As a crystal reflects the sun's rays, so did Thérèse

[1] It is customary in many convents to write a short account of the Sisters when they die.

radiate the light of God, joining the wisdom of age to the simplicity of a child.

She hungered for God, seeking him alone, living in him and by him, ever listening to his Voice speaking to her in the depths of her heart, intent on his working within her soul, and it was there that her grandeur and her riches were found.

When still only a child her principal interest had been to practise mortification and to cultivate virtue: to please our Lord, to sacrifice everything for him, to suffer silently for his sake, daily asking herself this question: "Is Jesus pleased with me?" As we have said, the supreme beauty of her religious life lay within. It was seen in the ardour with which she performed her smallest duties, in the fervour of her prayers, in the loftiness of her intentions, in the generosity of her immolation. Thérèse is sublime when, in the loving outpourings of her heart, she speaks of having found heaven in Carmel; and God, who gauges the intensity of our love and our generosity in suffering, found her at twenty-four years of age ripe for heaven.

By means of the living words of *The Story of a Soul,* God made known this little soul, who though ignored by the world, had glorified him during life, and after death continued to glorify him, drawing all hearts to follow his example. Here, then, is God's purpose: he created her, formed her, glorified her for his own glory, and

for our salvation. It requires no great intellectual effort to see and understand all this in the short story of Thérèse of the Child Jesus.

To superficial minds she may appear an ordinary nun who lived ignored by the world, absorbed in prayer, and who attained to the heights of glory merely through the exercise of the virtues common to her Order, but to our eyes this child is clearly marked with a special seal by the Hand of God to the end that the fame of her sanctity may be worldwide.

Modern society is the very antithesis of the Spirit of the Gospel, and in these times rife with clamour and discontent, we need holy and hidden souls like that of Thérèse to recall us to thoughts of heaven and to the true meaning of life, to illumine for us the path of virtue, and show us how real happiness is to be attained, and all this without alarming fearful and timid souls.

Saint Thérèse makes her appeal especially to us and to our times, for, indeed, we have lost all touch with the real and the true. The successes and conquests of genius, of science, and of modern progress, as well as the disappointments and sufferings resulting, in these latter days, from ambition and human cupidity, have blinded mankind and rendered it obstinate in its pain, and men believe themselves to have reached the height of happiness while in reality, both morally and spiritually, they are groaning in an

abyss of misery and degradation. The doctrine of the Gospel has been rejected, but men have found nothing to bring them peace and happiness in its stead.

Men despise humility, yet they are punished and humiliated to the very depths by pride.

That simplicity, which in the eyes of God is "the rule of innocence and the form of meekness,"[1] is in the world's eyes synonymous with cowardice; and deception, fraud, and falsehood reign supreme. Nowadays opposition to God's inspirations and his work in the world and in souls, moral and intellectual absolutism, which refuses to recognize God's intervention in anything and which attributes to natural strength and self-sufficiency success of any kind, have destroyed the obedience which comes of filial trust and confidence which touches the Heart of God, and is a cause even of earthly happiness for his creatures. Charity, that sublime virtue of the Gospel, which can change the face of the world and inaugurate an era of civil life based upon universal filial love of God, has to-day been driven from men's hearts. Instead, we have a peace and friendship which rest upon the unstable support of pride, while brother hates brother and men are torn in a shameful and useless strife. All things seem to be hastening to their destruction; the eternal code of truth and of peace has become the historical formula of a

[1] St Leo, *Sermon* 37.

philosophy and a moral teaching which are out of date, while souls are hungering for light, for goodness, for God!

There are zealous souls, it is true, who devote themselves heart and soul to the preaching of the Gospel, but its doctrine of wisdom and of consolation does not reach many needy souls; the crowd all absorbed by the labours of life does not heed it. We need a living commentary to rouse us; we need maxims which are simple, easy to understand and to remember; we need actions more than words; practice more than preaching; we need the Gospel, living and lived. And God, once more moved to compassion by the crowd that presses on him, has had pity on us, and has placed in our midst a soul which he has filled with the Spirit of the Gospel, and has said: "Here is a soul which I have raised up for my glory and your salvation." This is Thérèse of the Child Jesus, who, to all, great and small, learned and ignorant, in the cloister as in the world, teaches simply and attractively the ancient doctrine of the Gospel clothed anew in the language of our own day.

Thérèse is the child of Providence, who is to point out to all who are gone astray in the desert of the world the road to God, which has become obliterated and is only to be found again by following the path which she, with the charm and eagerness of a child, has marked out. To become spiritually children again, according to

the words and spirit of the Gospel, this is the path along which we must retrace our steps in order to regain the sight of heaven.

And in this spiritual new birth, which is the whole secret of Thérèse's greatness, is found God's glory and our own happiness. To seek to become great by becoming little, to become glorious by being humble, to be wise by being simple, this was Thérèse's "way." Whether as a child, as a girl, or as a nun, I do not think that in the eyes of the world there was ever anyone more fragile, more humble, more lowly, than she, and yet she knew how to find with the intuition of genius the straight and direct road to real greatness and truth.

She realized that to become great one must begin by being little, that only from the starting-point of earth can one reach heaven, and that the lower the depths from which the soul takes flight the higher will it soar. The genius of her sanctity discovered for her the elementary law of Christian perfection, which few observe and many neglect: to mount to the heights of sanctity with humility and confidence in the arms of God. This she called her divine "lift," this spirit of childlike trust she wished to teach and make known, setting herself to impart her "secret" to "little souls," and practising what she taught. Following the example of all the saints, she made for herself a life which is a very poem of abandonment, and of confidence

in God. No image, however sweet or simple, can equal the charm of her soul "delivered over" to the merciful goodness of God. The child, sleeping on its mother's breast, the little boat with its white sails making headway against the winds and the waves, guided by a ray of light shining down from heaven; these give us but a faint idea of the calm and joy of her soul in the midst of temptation.

Her confidence is unshaken; it never diminishes but ever increases, because she knows how to find support in a Heart which is all pity and mercy.

Her world is her own soul; her kingdom that of her own heart; virtue is what she labours for; her ideals are all heavenly; she thirsts only for the salvation of souls and her wings are the wings of love. A generous, trustful, considerate love: a love which is ever labouring; a love of secret, unknown self-immolation, renewed at every hour with increasing fervour. The less her love's sacrifice is known and appreciated, the less it expects a human reward, the more sublime is the act of immolation. Poet in mind and heart, she sings in touching accents of God's love for her and of her love for him. "To love him as he has never before been loved," was her cry. She drew her inspiration from all lovely things here below, the flowers, the stars, the heavens, the sea, to which her heart addressed the sweetest words of admiration, while they in their turn

spoke to her in alluring terms of the infinite beauty of their Maker. Thus did the little Carmelite of Lisieux speak and work and sing : thus did she pray from the depths of her soul, with all the music of her heart. Thus did she endeavour to raise herself, to grow, to become greater in the sight of God, yet to remain always a child in the littleness of her actions, in humility of soul, in simplicity of heart. This is Thérèse of the Child Jesus and in this her whole secret consists; a secret which her humility concealed within the walls of her home and of her convent, but which to-day God wills to be made known and preached and spread abroad to glorify and sanctify all those who, walking in Thérèse's footsteps, want to find the shortest road to heaven. In her illuminating spirit and in the charm of her example are to be found help and healing for us all.

We live in a restless age, inhale a poisonous atmosphere, and are corrupted by false doctrines; little Thérèse comes and teaches us that, if we wish to be happy, we must practise the simplicity that Christ practised and preached. She urges us to become as little children again, and with their spirit of confidence abandon ourselves into the loving arms of God, who, while all else shifts and changes, remains for ever stable.

For poor sinners Thérèse has words of encouragement; bidding them look up to the serene

Face of God, opening out before them a whole heaven of mercy and kindness.

She is, moreover, the Guardian Angel of Youth, that dearest hope of the Church, threatened by the terrible contagion of sin, and often doomed to fall before attaining maturity. She is a child of their own times, one who profited so well by her own early years that she is able to teach the young how to turn all things to the service and love of God, who alone can really satisfy their hearts and give them true happiness.

She teaches them by her own example to love family life, obedience, and labour, which together with virtue go to make up the one useful apprenticeship of any vocation to which God may call them.

St Thérèse is, then, the teacher and model of "little souls"; of all who in the secret of their hearts are seeking God, and for souls such as these she has reduced holiness to a very simple form, easily adapted to every age and every condition, and of which none need be afraid.

Until to-day we have been accustomed to regard holiness as an exceptional and privileged state; we have thought of the saints as giants, or as utterly inimitable people, Paul, Francis, Catherine, Teresa of Jesus, Philip, Ignatius, Xavier—heroes who have brought about a revolution among souls and who have left their indelible mark upon the world's history.

To-day Thérèse comes to teach us by her own

example that the first factor of sanctity is the grace of God, which did, indeed, achieve wonderful things in the great saints, but which produces great results in every soul ready to correspond, to collaborate and to yield itself unconditionally to him. She teaches that there is something which pleases God as much as the heroic, apostolic, and wonder-working virtues of the saints, and that is simplicity and humility; whole-hearted devotion to one's duty; continuous prayer; a generous spirit ready for sacrifice and immolation; abandonment and confidence in God; and above all *love*—the sole measure of all greatness and all happiness.

Let us then rejoice in our Lord and thank him from the bottom of our hearts that he has deigned to give this little Saint as a teacher and a model to us "little souls," who, with her, follow a vocation which, humanly speaking, is humble and ordinary. Let all those rejoice who, like her, lead lives made up of small things, in which there is little change and much weariness. Do not let us despise these humble things; they are God's will for us, our means of sanctification, and they give glory to him. Let us all live our lives in faith, in love, in joy, in submission to God's will, that so he may say of us as of Thérèse: *In gloriam meam creavi eam.*

We want, O Thérèse of the Child Jesus, to repeat the prayer which your Sisters in the Monastery of Lisieux addressed to you, when,

after your death, they gave you for the first time to the world:

"Smile, smile still from heaven, little Sister! Remember the promise which you made before your death. 'When I am in heaven then will my work begin. I want to spend my heaven in doing good upon earth.'"

We await the fulfilment of your promise. We await your roses. Let them fall upon all suffering souls, so that the road to heaven may be made easier. Glorify God in us, Thérèse, as, for us, God has glorified you. May we all love and imitate you here below, so as to be reunited with you in heaven.

SERMON II

ST THÉRÈSE'S GREATNESS

"Super senes intellexi." (Words of David which Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus made her own.)—*From the* PSALMS.

"I HAVE vanquished the wisdom of the aged." These are the bold words of the boy David, son of Isai, of the strong and ancient race of shepherds, who went up from the camp at Bethlehem, where God had spoken to his heart.

He possessed nothing but his soul, pure and fresh as the cup of the lily, and he knew nothing except how to use his sling and wield his shepherd's staff, yet it was of this fair young shepherd of Ephrata that God made a soldier, a king, a prophet, a poet, who was to sing in moving tones: *Super senes intellexi.* I have vanquished the wisdom of the aged. And in truth his words were no lie, for he surpassed the expectations of his people when he came bravely forth to fight—he, a speck of dust, against the arms and the strength of the giant of the Philistines—Goliath.

And he overthrew him; the stone shot from the boy's sling struck the giant's head and felled him to the ground.

This was no wonder, for his God-given

strength lay not in his arms, but in his soul. God, with whom there is no change, always acts thus, going against the crooked ways, the limited, short-sighted ideas of men.

He who does not measure greatness by exterior dimensions, but who looks for virtue and tests the strength of humility, and the wisdom of simplicity, in order to work wonders that astound the world, does not need a king, a warrior, a diplomat, a scientist, nor a man of letters, he can make use of a mere child. We have a proof of this in the famous example of David, an example reproduced among ourselves. In these days when God is hated and blasphemed and man is corrupted and debased, Goliath seems to live again, and the giant of this world has thrown down a defiant challenge to God and to his people, provoking him to exert his mighty power. And so to-day God stoops to confound the world by making use of a child—a soul so utterly wanting in human resources, so devoid of external show, that it seemed to resemble an angelic spirit, one who passed through this world with the swiftness of a vision. No soul ever had a dwelling-place more fragile, more defenceless; that of a child who was of no importance to the world, a nun, a Carmelite.

This child with her golden hair and blue eyes was another David; all her possessions lay hidden within her pure heart, and her only weapon was her simplicity.

We have heard it said again and again that hers was a simple soul, childlike in thoughts and words and actions; that she did nothing great or worthy of admiration.

This is a foolish, overhasty judgement which would almost find fault with God himself for his mistake in having glorified so insignificant a creature. But God cannot err; he is able to penetrate into the depths of a soul about which men have only formed a superficial opinion, and Thérèse's virtue must have been very great in his Eyes to deserve so signal and so universal a triumph.

Moreover, it is untrue to say that she did nothing. She did everything in her short span of twenty-four years. She achieved conquests which the great ones of the earth could not have achieved in centuries. She did what other illustrious saints only accomplished in a long lifetime. She conquered the world by the simplicity of her life and her practice of virtue.

Let us see how she did this. Although it be true that history repeats itself, none the less each century has its own character and characteristics, its own aspirations, its own methods of progress, and our own times might justly be symbolized by the giant Goliath, clad in armour, proud, and loud-voiced. Never, perhaps, at any time did the concupiscence of the eyes so much prevail. Noise, self-advertisement, vice, sophism, arti-

ficiality, here we have the psychology of the modern world—hard words, indeed, which we like to gloss over and to replace by others such as sensationalism, modernism, diplomacy. Everywhere to-day we meet with pretentiousness —it has spread like a contagious poison among men. The desire to break away from the ordinary paths of life amounts to an obsession; to talk and to get oneself talked about, to pose, if possible, as a genius in politics, or science, in the fine arts, or in the army—or, all else failing, then in delinquency or even crime! As long as one's name is on everyone's lips and sounds in the ears of all, even though it be only execrated and cursed, this, at any rate, is a triumph over mediocrity and silence. Is not this the very essence of pride, the very height of folly! And confronting this fever of folly there stands ever—rejected, it is true, but unchanging—the maxim of the Gospel: "He who wishes to be great let him become as the least." We have too often neglected and forgotten these words of life, and to-day God has come to remind us all of them. He has clothed them with life in Thérèse of the Child Jesus, his latest gift from heaven, sent to earth to oppose the perversity of our times and to bring us to the harbour of salvation. And who really is Thérèse of the Child Jesus? A child of our own erring age, of whom many among us may say: "She was born after me"—a child whose life was silent and who only became known to the

world after her death through the story of her life, which revealed her simplicity, her attractiveness, her charm, her art of self-forgetfulness, and the hidden life she led for God alone. We should read her life and try to attune our minds to it, for it is so short and brief and made up of such simple things that we may easily fail to understand it. All that there is to say of Thérèse both in life and after death may be divided into three chapters—that of her family, of Carmel, and of heaven.

Her family was her world; no other existed for her, and its confines were the house and garden at Lisieux. She loved the skies, they spoke to her of heaven and of the eternal happiness to come, while the landscape, the sea, the flowers were to her as the reflection of heaven filling her heart with ecstasy. Thérèse's family were bound together by so strong and holy an affection that she seemed to be living in a world of love. She and her sisters were kindred souls, sisters not only by blood, but also in their practice of virtue and in their high and sacred ambitions. They vied with one another in their desires for perfection and in generosity towards God, and Thérèse from her earliest childhood had learnt from them to offer little secret sacrifices which she was one day heroically to hide even from herself. Beautiful in body as in soul, she was tall and straight as a lily; golden curls crowned her head, her brow was high and smooth, her big blue eyes

shone with life and intelligence, and her voice was sweet and musical.

Her baby words were of a kind very unusual at her age—full of faith and of love for God. "Mother, I should like you to die soon." "Why?" "So that you might go to heaven and see God."

"Look, father, my name is already written in heaven," and she gazed smilingly at the constellation of Orion formed rather like a "T."

"Tell me, little sister, do you think Jesus is pleased with me?"[1] These are some of her words. Were not such innocence and beauty irresistible? Her good parents worshipped her, especially her father, who would clasp the little golden head to his breast, gazing at her and fondling her as though in an ecstasy, and would say to her, "My little Queen—Queen of France; Queen of Navarre!" Her actions were like those of any child, but they were performed with a wisdom and discretion surprising in one so young. It is true that Thérèse was by nature inclined to pride; like all children, she thought that others could not get on without her. This tended to make her exacting and domineering, but this was the only mark by which she could be known as a daughter of Eve!

This fault, whilst still a small child, she com-

[1] From *The Story of a Soul,* translated by Fr. Taylor, whose version has been made use of wherever the Autobiography is quoted.

bated and overcame. Suffering first touched her when her mother died, and this loss made her more thoughtful, more sweet, and more obedient. After the death of her dear mother, she went to school, where she studied and prayed, and her prayer was that she might soon have the grace to make her First Communion. Spiritual subjects were her favourite studies; Christian Doctrine and the Gospels, to which she gave all her attention, meditating on them in faith and simplicity, tasting their sweetness and drawing from them her rule of life. She was hardly eight years old when she knew the *Imitation of Christ* by heart, having chosen to learn this book because all her prayer and all her study were to lead her to imitate Jesus. Thérèse was radiantly happy on the day of her first meeting with our Lord, and was full of joy when she received the Sacrament of Confirmation. When she was dangerously ill she was saved by a smile from her heavenly Mother.

When Thérèse reached thirteen years of age she was very attractive, well educated, cultured, and charming; loving music and poetry and pictures, but all this was as nothing compared with the beauty and the perfection of her soul.

God was to her soul the sun that knows no setting. With a faith akin to that of her parents, ever since her childhood's days she had drunk in God, had yielded up her soul to be absorbed by him. A flower, the sea, the snow, the skies, all

drew her to him. Her most ardent desire was to please him, and she hungered and thirsted to speak with him in prayer, to be united with him in Holy Communion, and by her immolation to save souls for him.

I do not hesitate to affirm that Thérèse, in a manner, saw God. Did she, perhaps, walk with him in her garden at home, as did the boy David in the camp at Bethlehem, and if God spoke to her, what did he say? "Child, behold Life. What is it? A passing day of sorrow. What are its joys? A fevered dream from which the awakening is torment, death. What is death? It is the beginning of a life that never dies. And then? heaven, the unending, the eternal. Will you come with me, my child, and be all mine?" And Thérèse answered: "Yes, yes, with thee, O Lord, to be for ever thine." And thus in her heart this child became espoused to God. Thérèse had made her decision, and she chose—Carmel.

Dear child, you have made your choice, and no one on earth can oppose you, but you know that in your heart, enshrined as on an altar, is your love for your father, a love which God has not forbidden.

Think, child, of his love, of his hopes, of his declining years. He has already given God so much—three daughters! And now you, the last ray of sunshine of his old age, his best-beloved, his "little Queen." God spared Thérèse decided

and painful opposition from her father such as the great Teresa of Jesus, her mother, had to endure, but her father's consent involved martyrdom of heart for him as well as for her. The talk which she had with him, and which was perhaps the most serious of Thérèse's home life, took place on Whit-Sunday.

The child had purposely waited for this day that the Holy Spirit might give her strength to speak. Let us picture the scene: Thérèse is sitting with her father in the shady garden of their home, and far in the distance, standing out like a clump of lilies against the green background, are the white walls of the Carmelite Monastery.

Thérèse is silent and thoughtful; her father, who for some time has noticed her preoccupation, taking her hands in his, asks her lovingly: "My little Queen, what is the matter? Tell your father." And Thérèse, weeping, speaks to him of Carmel; through a mist of tears her father sees it all; God is asking him for his youngest child!

To the rights of God his own must yield, and with a breaking heart he answers like a saint, "God's will be done." Great and generous father, we bless you now in the moment of your child's triumph which is also yours, we praise you, we bless you, we thank you in the name of the Church, in the name of Carmel, in the name of all the souls to whom you gave your little saint. Great, indeed, was your sacrifice, but God

who has weighed it repays you to-day in his own magnificently generous way, for he has given you back your little daughter not on a throne but on an altar, not Queen of France and of Navarre, as you were wont lovingly to call her, but Queen of the World, ravisher of hearts!

So, God having smoothed away all difficulties, Thérèse at fifteen years of age winged her way to Carmel!

Do you know what Carmel is? It is a garden in which God may gather flowers of great beauty. The reflowering of this garden was brought about by the spirit of the great Teresa of Jesus, who had but one idea—to make a home where the Divine Spouse of Souls, so often misunderstood, neglected, rejected by the world, might take refuge.

And what is the life of Carmel? It is a high and noble and unconditional renunciation of the world and the senses; it requires rigorous poverty and angelic purity.

What do they do in Carmel? They work and pray. And what is their reward? Heaven.

A Carmelite nun is the vestal of Christ, and her sacred and wonderful duty is to keep burning the flame of the love of God. Thérèse already knew something of this life, for she had caught glimpses of it during her fleeting visits to her sisters, and she dreamt of it as of her heaven on earth.

During the Lent of 1888 she entered Carmel. In 1889 she put on the religious habit. In 1890 she made her vows as a Carmelite and became the spouse of Jesus.

We have reached the second chapter of her life. What did Thérèse do in Carmel? It would be easier to say what she did *not* do. For, indeed, Thérèse had no ecstasies, nor raptures, nor revelations—she received no stigmata. She did not reform her monastery, nor did she write mystical books; she did no great penances, beyond what the Rule required. I would say more, that owing to her delicate health she was not even always able to observe the Carmelite Rule completely. Her religious life was so ordinary as to puzzle the Sisters, who, following the Carmelite custom, would have to write something about her to the other houses after her death, and did not know what there would be to say. But then—what is there that is extraordinary in Thérèse? We have the right to ask, What mystery is here?

Why did this soul who did nothing great in the short time that she lived as a Carmelite surpass all her Sisters in virtue and fervour? Why did they give her the charge of helping to train the novices before she was twenty years of age? How, in barely nine years, did Thérèse acquire such merits as to deserve heaven and the glory of being raised to the Altars of the Church?

Where do her heroism and her greatness lie

hidden? This is the mystery of St Thérèse, which only God has fathomed. One word of our Lord's can enlighten us and give us the key to the mystery. "Become as little children." Thérèse took this word, studied it, and discovered that it contained the great secret for reaching heaven easily and swiftly, and so she lived by it: wiser and more prudent than others, she made this teaching her "lift," her throne, and she was triumphantly successful.

Hardly had she entered Carmel than, getting rid of the last obstacle to complete separation from the world and freeing herself from every hindrance to happiness, she set to work.

She wanted to be a saint, to be like God, with the logic of the saints she reasoned thus:

"God would never send me inspirations impossible for me to follow, therefore I may aspire to be a saint. To become great is impossible for me, and I do not aspire to it, neither do I dream of accomplishing anything wonderful. I want to go to heaven by a very short, straight, little path, a very sure way, not walking by myself, but letting myself be carried, like a child, in our Lord's arms."

This was how she reasoned, and let none say, "This is childish folly," for Thérèse has struck the right note. Herein lies the genius of her sanctity: that she has discovered, in truth and reality for herself and for us all, our right place before God.

For what, after all, is man, even though he possess the fervour of the Seraphim, the intelligence of a genius, the perfection of all the saints? Compared with the length of eternity man's life is like a second of time; in presence of immensity he is an atom; before God he is a child, less than a child. And it is only when he accepts this position, which is his real and true one, that he can grow and become a king and rule over all things.

A babe of a day old cannot speak, cannot walk, has no will of his own, no liberty, but he is happy, and will grow up because of the breast which nourishes him, of the mother who carries him. He has a heart to love him and be interested in him so that he need not trouble in any way about himself. Now this is Thérèse's art. To become daily more little and more simple, to hide herself from the eyes of all around her, annihilating all that belongs to herself in order to concentrate all her strength in the secret and silence of her soul. There no one can enter, and there, lost in the abyss of her own nothingness, she can live and work with God, collaborating with all his divine operations.

God alone works within her, for she is nothing and he is all. Nothingness can do nothing, but God, of nothing, can create and produce marvellous things. And so Thérèse is humble, obedient, chaste, poor, sweet, patient, mortified, tranquil. All things are to her equally good: to be subject, forgotten, neglected, to want for

necessaries, to be in consolation or desolation, to be peaceful or to be tempted; for she lives by faith and hope and loves all that God loves. She wanted all things, for she sought nothing, and she sought nothing because she sought the All, God: that he might live in her, that she might live by him—and be to him a ceaseless Amen united to the Eternal Amen of heaven.

Spiritual childhood is an integral part of this abandonment, and in Thérèse's life they are as inseparable as scent from flower, as echo from sound.

And while the heart and soul of this marvellous child are growing in faith and confidence, God is showering his gifts upon her; light, joy, virtue—all that torrent of graces which a soul given entirely to God is capable of receiving. No one but God himself knew of these ineffable graces. Because of the veil of her simplicity and humility only a few rays have reached us; only an echo of the music of her soul has sounded in our ears, and this has come to us through *The Story of a Soul,* which she herself penned during the last weary days of her exile.

How powerless are words to relate the wonders of this soul, yet even the little they tell us is beyond our understanding and appreciation. One feels something, on reading the book, of the fire that burnt in her heart; one realizes something of the fervour with which her humble duties were performed; of the sublimity of her

intention directed to God; of the generosity with which she gave herself for sinners; we are conscious of the love which in her amounts to ecstasy, of her all-absorbing desire for suffering, in her prayer that pain of mind and heart and thought and body may be her portion. One can hear the heavenly music which is poured forth from her soul as from a harp. And God was not able to resist—if one may be allowed the expression—he felt the charm of this angel in exile, was moved by the cry of this innocent child and he answered it. She had fulfilled a long time in a short space, and God did not allow the bud of the lily to open: the divine Eagle bore swiftly down to carry it away on his wings into the highest heaven, among the splendours of the saints.

And all this happened barely thirty years ago!

What would have come to pass if Thérèse of the Child Jesus had attained to the fulness of years? What would she have done for souls; what high secrets would she not have made known to us, how much good might she not have done around her? What apostolic work would she not have accomplished among sad and suffering souls, she who to-day would only be fifty-four years of age? Let us not hesitate for a moment: were Thérèse of the Child Jesus living to-day she would certainly be as childlike in soul and as remarkable for humility and simplicity as ever she was, because these are what

really count in the sight of God. All the great and striking things which she did not accomplish on earth God has allowed her to accomplish in heaven. Heaven for Thérèse does not mean only joy and glory, but also missionary enterprise and apostolic work for the salvation of souls. Before her death she said: "In heaven I shall not be inactive; I want to spend my heaven in doing good upon earth until the day when the angel's trumpet shall sound for the passing away of time. Then only shall I rest. After my death I shall let fall a shower of roses from heaven."

The child has not forgotten her promise. She has cast her spell (may we say it) over God himself. She rules as a queen indeed, for he allows her to pillage the gardens of heaven there to gather flowers to let fall upon the sadness and the mire of this world.

For where have these flowers not fallen? Is there a corner of the earth which has not known their fragrance? Has any soul who knows Thérèse failed to gather up at least one petal of her roses? Everywhere and on everyone—on souls as well as bodies; in religious houses, in schools, in families, in hospitals, in barracks, on battlefields, amid the clash of arms, Thérèse has come down like an angel of joy bringing with her the smiles of heaven, to comfort the living, to strengthen the dying, to speak to all of immortal hope.

Her mystical roses have filled the earth, and from its every corner there has gone up to her a chorus of gratitude, of love, of admiration, and of praise; and to the Church a universal cry of supplication that the day of the glorification of this little Treasurer of the Heart of God may not be long delayed. The Church has listened to these requests, for they are inspired by an enthusiasm which rests upon well-attested marvels and numberless favours obtained by Thérèse. These statements have been weighed and sifted, and to-day God has solemnly declared by the voice of his Vicar on earth that the young Carmelite of Lisieux is worthy of the title of Saint on account of the heroism of her virtues and because the divine seal has been placed upon the wonders wrought by her intercession.

And so the unknown girl whom France called Thérèse Martin; the humble nun who, hidden in Carmel, was called Thérèse of the Child Jesus, to-day in heaven and on earth is St Thérèse of the Child Jesus.

It seems to me that all the splendour of human glory and all the triumphs of the great people of this world, even if one imagines them as having been won by a single man, do not equal one ray of the glory of this soul who surpassed them all by her humility and simplicity. This is the reward and the sanction given by God to those who carry out his precept: "He who becomes

as a little child shall be great in the kingdom of heaven."

In your humility and simplicity, Thérèse, you have found again the path which we had lost, the way of spiritual childhood, and of confidence in God, which you trod in all the charm of your faith, of your hope, and of your love. Draw us all after you, attract us all to virtue and to God.

Remember your promise. Rain down your mystic roses on all souls and on this age to which you yourself belong. Extinguish the pride and impiety of the world.

Sanctify us all! Console us all.

SERMON III

ST THÉRÈSE'S SECRET[1]

"Non ambulavi in magnis, neque in mirabilibus . . . sed exaltavi animam meam." ("I did not walk in the way of wonders and marvels, but my soul was exalted.") —PSALM CXXX.

ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM describes man with his pretensions and foolish petty ways by a happy simile. "Man," says the holy doctor, "is like a child who, when he has climbed a mountain and has reached the summit, faces the sun, and, filling his cheeks with air, tries to blow it out, imagining that he will be able to extinguish its fierce flame."

And, indeed, so it is: man thinks he knows everything, that he can do everything, whereas in reality he knows nothing, can do nothing.

Because he is able to raise himself a few feet in the air, he thinks that he is master of the skies. Because he can penetrate into the depths of the earth and of the sea he imagines that he has made himself master of all their treasures, and discovered all their mysteries, whereas, in reality, he has but grazed the outer crust of the

[1] Preached in the Church of St Egidio in Trastevere, Rome, December 7, 1923.

earth and skimmed over the surface of its waters. Because he has gazed upon some of the stars, he fancies he has exhausted the constellations. Even supposing that he did know and could do all this, still of all that remains he would know little or nothing.

Man has within himself another world, rich in treasure and in mystery, magnificent in its beauty and harmony, and which, though invisible, contains all the marvels of the visible one. It is a mysterious world with its own life and air, its own vegetation, its own food, and its own sun. Here there are two persons at work, one far exalted above the other, though united in co-operation—God and man.

God, who gives himself with inexhaustible generosity under the form of grace and of virtue —and man, who receives God's gifts, and who speaks, who works, who lives by God.

This world is the human soul which has "put on" God and his virtues.

This is an enlightening truth, a most sublime fact, misunderstood and neglected by the majority of men. The Church has lately raised to her Altars Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus. The eyes and hearts of the faithful to-day turn towards her, but the world repeats the old censures: "One more victim of superstition"—"A poor deluded invalid"—"Once more a beautiful young girl has died a pitiable death in a prison of her own seeking!"

But we, on the other hand, accustomed to reason by the light of truth and reality, say : " A holy soul full of God's grace." Her life was so simple and obscure and, above all, so short that we might compare her to an angel, a vision, or a star, which crossed the heavens and then disappeared, leaving behind it a trail of bright and shining light.

St Thérèse had understood from her childhood that real merit and glory are not necessarily found in external heroism, but she knew that all glory and riches here below belong to that interior kingdom of the spirit which St Augustine calls " the City of God." Consequently withdrawing into herself she left the world for the cloister, and enclosing herself within her mystical city she concentrated all her activities and all her labours on this wonderful building of her soul, beautifying it, and adorning it with the riches of virtue.

And in this superb city, of which God alone is King, she grew and became strong and made ready for her immortal life : she " put on immortality."

This is her secret, this is what she called " her little way." A secret which she wished to make known to all when she repeats the words of the Psalmist : " I did not walk in the way of wonders and marvels, but my soul was exalted " (Ps. cxxx).

That her soul should be exalted; this is the

outcome of Thérèse's secret and the sum of all perfection as we find it in the Gospel, and both in word and in action this was the teaching of Jesus Christ, the Master of all truth and holiness. His one desire seems to have been to bring into relief the superiority of the soul and its immortal destiny as contrasted with the needs and the cares and the joys of the passing life of the body. Our Lord himself paid the most solemn act of homage to his new doctrine, so subversive of the old theories regarding the dignity of matter and of the flesh, by the mortification and self-denial with which his whole life on earth was filled. Poor and rejected from his birth, hidden and mortified in his life, naked and humiliated in death, despising grandeur and the comforts of life, suffering pain of every kind with patience, he had freed his spirit from the slavery of the senses and of material things and proclaimed the advent of the new happiness, of the real glory, which he came to offer to all who would understand and rule their lives by the Christian virtues.

St Thérèse heard and understood this doctrine, and in it she discovered the great secret of her swift and enchanting means of sanctification. On re-reading *The Story of a Soul,* one is in admiration of the profound study she made of interior perfection, the art that she brought to bear upon it, never wearied or anxious, but calmly and serenely devoting herself entirely to

it. The labour was begun by an absolute and unconditional surrender of herself to the working of divine grace which, at first sight, may appear simply passive, but which, on the contrary, involved action and reaction against the passions which spring up like weeds in the garden of the soul. It needed assiduous and generous labour to bring forth the flowers of virtue in this rebellious soil. "From the age of three I never refused our Lord anything," she says, and the gradual acquisition of the Christian virtues, the slow development of the interior gifts with which God's assisting grace enriched her, began at once from her early youth, even before reason held sway over the passions. Helped by good advice and wholesome correction, she learnt to do what was right without any feeling of happiness, but simply to please God. "Is our Lord pleased with me?"[1] Thérèse would ask her sister every night, and would anxiously await the answer, which was for her the whole reward of a day spent in making little sacrifices.

Obedience, simplicity, mortification, and sacrifice are interwoven like delicate threads throughout Thérèse's childhood and help to form the fabric of her soul. Intertwined with these are the characteristic virtues of her "little way"—her "secret"—humility, confidence, and love, the beginning, middle, and end of her sanctity, the

[1] *The Story of a Soul*, chap. ii.

stages passing through which she won her way to heaven.

Humility, which seems to be abjection and littleness, is, on the contrary, the great lever which raises us heavenwards—the virtue which wins the Heart of God himself! The more a man exalts himself by pride the farther does God withdraw from him, while, on the other hand, the more he lowers himself by humility so much the nearer does God draw nigh to him, says St Augustine.

Thérèse's study of this virtue showed her God's infinite beauty and man's infinite misery in an entirely new light. Is not this the fundamental essence of all perfection? *Noverim Te, noverim me.* "Lord, that I may know thy greatness and my own littleness."

And so Thérèse's childlike mind imagined God as even better, more loving, and wiser than her father, who to her was simply incomparable, and that she might know and possess God entirely she let everything else go—the enjoyment of life, the love of her people. Moreover, she desired this knowledge and possession for others. She really wished that the father and mother whom she adored might die; neither did she dare to pray for the cure of some sick people whom she loved for fear that the possession of God might be withheld from them.

God had ravished her heart. She wanted to know him better and better, and so she studied

her catechism in a kind of transport of joy, and would heroically keep silence for an hour, listening to her eldest sister preparing Céline for her First Communion!

"Tell me about God! Teach me how to meditate."[1] Thérèse did not care about any relaxation or recreation which had not God for its end.

And when her father took her for walks in the country she would gaze silently at the skies and think of God beyond the blue veil of the heavens. This constant turning of her thoughts to God drew her soul into close contact with him, and made her conscious of her own littleness, and the sight made a deep impression on her soul, giving her a knowledge of herself, of her own nothingness, and of her own misery. These thoughts did not cast her down, rather did they become for her a cause for exultation; she loved her own nothingness, she took pleasure in her own littleness, and she was quite determined never to cease to be little, but always to remain a child before God, because she knew that humility is the only thing which could attract the Creator to his creature and make him take up his abode within her soul. "I must remain little: rather I must always become more and more little. I am not cast down," she said, "when I realize my misery: on the contrary,

[1] Deposition of one of her Benedictine Mistresses at Lisieux.

that is what raises me up and glorifies me."[1] This supernatural light which flooded her soul she accounted to be one of the greatest graces God had given her. "The Almighty has done great things for me, but the greatest is that of having let me know my own littleness, my inability to accomplish any good whatsoever."[2]

Thérèse understood and correctly gauged the proportions of human things when measured by the immensity, the infinity, the power of God, and had put herself in her right place. In the supernatural life she ranked herself with the children—the humblest, poorest, weakest, and most feeble creatures who in all their needs look to the one who has given them life. And knowing this, Thérèse, in her right place before God, adored and glorified him in the fullest and purest joy of her heart, referred everything to him and gave back to him all that she had received from his merciful bounty.

It is this very littleness which gives her strength and power and the right to all things; in the abyss of her humility she lost herself, hid herself, annihilated herself, that God might live and that she might live by God in ever closer and more real relations with him who was her All.

Here we are initiated into her secret: this is the gate of her "little way" along which in con-

[1] *Story of a Soul*, chap. ix. [2] *Ibid.*

fidence and abandonment she flies to the arms of God.

Humility begets confidence. A poor little delicate babe is always watching his mother and his piteous cries remind her of his weakness.

A child is something sacred, worthy of respect and veneration, and what makes him so is his littleness, his weakness, his poverty. This little weak creature needs a support, a guardian to direct and defend him, who will take all responsibility for him, and to this kind person he will entirely devote himself; he will let him do just as he wills with him, for love can make a very slave of a child.

A babe, whether he be clasped to his mother's breast, or lying in the arms of one who has stolen him from his cradle, will sleep equally peacefully because he has not the power to doubt that the one who carries him, whoever he may be, will have pity on his weakness. Wonderful serenity! Enviable peace! This is weakness triumphing over strength, nothingness vanquishing all things.

And that which in the natural order is happiness to an unconscious babe, in Thérèse's soul became virtue which reflected and radiated merit and joy.

Thérèse has described her soul, rich in its spirit of confidence, by her image of the little white-sailed boat, tossed on the stormy waters of the ocean, making its way towards the shore

along a path of light shining down from the heavens. The boat is the soul; the rough sea is life; the skies are God; the luminous path is trust. So does the fragile barque of her soul make its way now through the peaceful waters, now against the fury of the storm; rising and falling in rough or calm weather, in rest or labour, in joy or in agony; now seeming to touch the heavens, now the bottom of the abyss, yet, in spite of winds and clouds, always advancing.

The calm gives place to the storm, the waves roll higher, all around is movement, unrest, darkness. God alone is tranquil, immutable. God, who from heaven calls to her: "My child!" God, who from the depths of this exile delights in hearing her call him "Father," our heavenly Father, who is good and rich and powerful. The Father who in his infinite perfection can sanctify all her imperfections and satisfy all her desires. He who is her Riches in poverty, her Sunshine in darkness, her Everything in her nothingness, her Life in death. He calls her his little child, and draws her to himself with a force against which it is useless to struggle. And Thérèse yields herself to him, delivers herself over, allowing him to carry her while she rests upon his Heart.

No fear, no anxiety, no care whatever can disturb her peace because she knows the tenderness and the motherly solicitude of his Heart, and, above all, she knows the perfection of his love.

She has discovered the depths of his unfailing mercy, that long-suffering and inexhaustible mercy which forgives offences, overlooks forgetfulness, and returns blessings for outrages: the mercy of God which daily makes his sun to gladden the earth saddened by the sins of his children. Thérèse knows no fear; her one study is how to abandon herself into the arms of God, deprived of liberty, despoiled of her own will: for, she argues, if by an impossibility a babe endeavoured to throw himself out of his mother's arms and to walk on his own feet and do his own will against the will of his parents, he would certainly come to harm. Therefore she must remain in her littleness, never going beyond it, for outside of it she would be poor and miserable. With all her strength she sets herself to avoid pride which persuades one to think something of oneself, to fly vain complacency which stems the torrent of graces, to free her heart from any resistance which could alienate the Heart of God from his creature, and to *trust;* in joy, in pain, in temptation, in involuntary falls, always and only to trust, looking to her good Father in heaven, confiding in him even in her very infidelities, throwing herself at his Feet, pressing close to his Heart, living solely on love.

"Living by love I shall sail o'er life's ocean,
Scattering joy and thy peace in all hearts.
O Pilot Beloved, my love doth so urge me
I see thee in souls, I am pierced with its darts.

For love is my guiding-star leading me on
In its beautiful brightness, to heaven above,
On the sail of my barque is inscribed my device
'Live by Love.'"[1]

And the love of this little child of God did violence to the Heart of her heavenly Father, who through love brought the beauty of her soul to its perfection. Love is the culmination of little Thérèse's "secret." Grounded in humility, carried on the wings of trust, by charity she was transfigured. These three virtues (and Thérèse knew it well) are three jewels linked to one another by the single golden thread of love, but should love be wanting all perfection will fall to the ground. "Everything is subject to love," says St Francis de Sales—love will be king or nothing; it cannot live where it does not command, where it does not reign.[2]

And from her childhood little Thérèse was forearmed with the love of God, and this love, increasing with her years, became an abyss whose depths she could not fathom.

Love was her heaven, her destiny; love summed up her every aspiration, her every desire, all her vocation.

It was while she was reflecting on her own littleness and insufficiency that her vocation was revealed to her. How could her littleness be reconciled with her desires for heaven, with her

[1] Poem "Vivre d'Amour."
[2] *On the Love of God*, Bk. I, chap. vi.

"homesickness" for her heavenly country? Then she reflected with St Paul that not all can be at the same time apostles, prophets, doctors. She remembered that the Church, the mystical body of Christ, is composed of living members which depend upon one vital organ, the most noble and the most necessary—the heart, from which issues charity; and because without charity even the most precious gifts are worth nothing, she understood that if in the heart of the Church love had died out the apostles would have ceased to preach the Gospel, and the martyrs have lacked the generosity to shed their blood. Therefore, she concluded, with heavenly logic, love is everything, love comprises every vocation, love embraces all times and all places because it is eternal. Then, beside herself with joy, Thérèse cried out: "O Jesus, my Love, at last I have found my vocation. My vocation is love! I have found my place in the bosom of the Church, and this place, O my God, thou hast thyself given to me; in the heart of the Church, my mother, I will be Love! . . . Thus I shall be all things: thus will my dream be realized."

"O luminous Beacon of Love! I know how to come even unto thee, I have found the means of borrowing thy Fires!

"I am but a weak and helpless child, yet it is my very weakness which makes me dare to offer myself, O Jesus, as victim to thy love. . . . O

my God, I know it. Love is repaid by love alone.[1] Therefore I have sought, I have found how to ease my heart by rendering thee love for love. . . . But how shall I show my love, since love proves itself by deeds? Well! the little child will strew flowers before thee, that the divine Throne may be perfumed by their fragrance; she will sing Love's Canticle in silvery tones . . . which means that I will profit by the smallest actions. I will let no tiny sacrifice pass, no look, no word, all, all for Love. I wish to suffer for Love's sake, and for Love's sake even to rejoice: thus shall I strew flowers. Not one shall I find without scattering its petals before thee . . . and I will sing . . . I will sing always even if my roses must be gathered from amidst thorns; and the longer and the sharper the thorns, the sweeter shall be my song. . . . Yes, O my Jesus, I love thee! . . . Yet are not my boundless desires but dreams—but foolishness? If this be so, I beseech thee to enlighten me; thou knowest I seek but the truth. . . . If the mere desire of thy Love awakens such delight, what will it be to possess it, to enjoy it for ever? How can a soul so imperfect as mine aspire to the plenitude of love. . . . Yet notwithstanding my exceeding littleness, I dare to gaze upon the divine Sun of Love, and I burn to dart upwards unto him! I would fly! I would imitate the eagles; but all that I can do is to lift

[1] St John of the Cross.

up my little wings—it is beyond my feeble power to soar. . . . O Eternal Word! O my Saviour! Thou art the divine Eagle whom I love—who lurest me! Thou, who, descending to this land of exile, didst will to suffer and to die, in order to bear away the souls of men and plunge them into the very heart of the Blessed Trinity—Love's Eternal Home! . . . I know that the saints have made themselves as fools for thy sake; being 'eagles' they have done great things. I am too little for great things, and my folly is to hope that thy Love accepts me as victim; my folly it is to hope to fly unto thee with thine own wings, O my divine Eagle! For as long a time as thou willest I shall remain—my eyes fixed upon thee, because I long to be allured by thy divine Eyes; I would become Love's prey. I have the hope that one day thou wilt swoop down upon me, and bear me away to the Source of all Love, thou wilt plunge me at last into that glowing abyss, that I may become for ever its happy victim!"

Here we have her own words. But we must not stop at her eloquence, because with Thérèse love did not consist in mere thoughts or barren sentiment. Her love was a love of passionate desire to realize itself in action. She herself tells us this: "There is but one expression for love—deeds." And so this soul, thirsting for love, in love with God, gave all she had, did all that she was capable of doing. How lavish were both

nature and grace in their gifts to her of all that was pure, delicate, high, and profound! Everything in her spoke of love. Her soul, her heart, her thoughts, her words, her attitude, her whole being, all that she did from her greatest to her smallest actions, even more the small things than the great ones. She inflames all with her love in order to make them pleasing to him.

"I want to give Jesus everything! Everything, everything for him, and when I have nothing to offer him I will offer that nothing."[1] There was not a beating of her heart, not a thought of her mind, not a fibre of her being which did not love. In work and in rest, in quiet and temptation, in hours of peace and in long dark days of suffering she loved to immolate herself to God on the altar of love. When her soul was in agony, her heart bruised, her every feeling wounded, her body crucified, with bleeding feet and eyes full of tears her hands were full of roses, and she sang and smiled because her pain was love, because her heart was rapt in a very ecstasy of love. But love asks something more, it has one supreme test—generosity—a generosity which nothing can conquer, it demands the last generous act of renunciation, the final achievement—death—"Greater love than this no man hath than to give his life

[1] Letter to M. Agnes of Jesus.

for his friend."[1] To die of love! This was the martyrdom for which Thérèse longed.

After having offered herself as a victim to the mercy of God, on one of her days of greatest agony, while meditating on the different stages of our Lord's Passion, the divine Archer let fly a dart of fire and wounded her heart. "It is impossible to give any idea of the intensity of this celestial flame. A moment more and she would have fallen consumed by love."[2] But God sustained her in order that she might endure the slower and more exquisite martyrdom of love.

"For love of thee I thirst! fulfil my hope,
Augment in me thine own celestial flame!
For love of thee I thirst! too scant earth's scope—
The glorious vision of thy face I claim!"

And as her fetters were loosened, and gradually fell away from her, Thérèse called on the angels to help her to sing her eternal love-song. Thus, after having lived only for love, she was to die of love, reiterating for the last time on earth the one and only purpose of her life. "Yes, O my God, I do love thee."

So did Thérèse bring to perfection a life equal to that of the great Christian heroes who died full of works and of years; in this way did she merit their reward and their glory. After contemplating an interior life so rich and so wonderful we have no longer the right to ask what

[1] St John xv, 13.
[2] Deposition of M. Agnes of Jesus.

Thérèse did that was great or sublime; we ought rather to admire not what she did, but what she was—we must look for the secret of her greatness and of her glory not around her but within her.

She took God's words literally, applied them to herself and made them her rule of life. Desiring to be a saint she made her own the virtue and heroism which, ignored by the world, are found in the soul. She went in search of true greatness, that which shines with heavenly glory; she became a saint by drawing ever nearer to the One who is the first Cause of all greatness, the Sunshine of the soul. A soul entirely under the spell of God, clothed in light, inflamed and on fire with the love of God, such was Thérèse of the Child Jesus. God, who by pouring his Love and his Grace upon this soul had filled it to overflowing with a torrent of glory, with extraordinary swiftness bore it away along the road of sanctity and presented to heaven and earth his little spouse crowned with the light of the saints. And in order that all the exterior actions which were wanting to Thérèse in her mortal life might be made good to her after death, God has manifested those treasures of virtue and beauty which in life she so carefully concealed in such a way that her holiness has spread beyond Carmel, beyond France, on all souls, throughout the entire world, and has raised her, great in her humility and her love, to a

place of triumph, to a height of glory and of fame which will never perish.

But, above all, God, the just rewarder of the merits of his saints, has granted the greatest wish of his spouse, the desire with which she concludes her Song of Love; the prayer that her blessed secret may be made known to all, that it may win over a multitude of humble souls worthy, like herself, of the divine Love.

To us it only remains to add our *fiat*. May God in his mercy grant that through Thérèse's merits all souls may discover her great secret of happiness and of glory and follow her "little way."

May all souls come to know that all the glory of the children of God must lie hid within the soul, and that only in humility, in trust, and in love is to be found the right to that happiness which to-day most surely is the reward of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus.

Happy Thérèse, dear little Queen, show yourself also to us in the beauty of your wonderful "secret," in the charm of your "little way," through which you attained to the heights of sanctity and winged your flight to heaven.

Cast the spell of your "secret" over us, draw us into your "way," convince us all that true greatness is found in humility of heart, that true power lies in filial and trusting abandonment into the merciful arms of God, and that perfect joy is found in love of him alone.

SERMON IV

ST THÉRÈSE'S APOSTOLATE

"Da mihi animas." ("Give me souls.")—GEN. xiv.

ALL the saints have thirsted to be apostles. Like God they are prodigal of their gifts—giving lavishly out of the abundance of their own hearts light, kindness, and joy; the knowledge and the possession of divine truth. It is impossible to love Jesus Christ and not feel something of his thirst for souls: that thirst which made him walk the roads of Galilee in search of them and, exhausted by fatigue, rest by the well of Sichar awaiting the woman of Samaria.

We cannot conceive what our Lord's love is unless we share his eager longing for souls, and unless in our work we enter into the travail of his divine Heart.

This has always been, and will always be, the case with the saints.

St Thérèse of the Child Jesus, that white flower so recently gathered in the enclosed garden of Carmel to adorn the altar of the Church, has all the characteristics of sanctity, including this apostolic spirit. Although she was only a woman, or, to say better, a girl, and a Carmelite, and, therefore, both by nature and

state of life ill-fitted for the career of a missionary, nevertheless, God did not withhold from her the glory of a soldier of Christ, for, indeed, she was in an unusual degree both soldier and apostle. Her burning zeal, her overwhelming generosity, her insatiable thirst to bring souls to God, were all the greater and more admirable because they were exercised in a higher, although more limited, sphere, and more fruitfully though less visibly. Without the external sign or the mission of an apostle she yet had her place in the immense field of the Communion of Saints, where, in the mystical Body of Christ, their merits and the life-giving grace of God are ever circulating. She placed at the service of the Church all the wonderful riches of her own soul: her love—made up of prayer, of immolation, of suffering, offered, she often repeated, for two ends—the missionary labours of priests, and the salvation of souls.

The wonderful and unusual activity of St Thérèse reveals to us another side of her greatness; that which, in the eyes of God, rendered her worthy of reward and of glory. God has taken the flowers of her charity, the fragrance of her prayer, the perfume of her sufferings into his own divine Hands and has showered them down upon souls in gifts of grace and salvation. In his sight her hidden and unknown labours were wonderfully fruitful, and earth and heaven are crowded with souls purchased by the riches

of this little apostle. For this God has exalted and glorified her before us, in order that admiring her we may follow her example, and so become collaborators with Christ in the redemption of souls.

In her apostolic spirit St Thérèse proved herself a worthy child of her great mother St Teresa of Jesus, for it is impossible not to think that the fire of the zeal of this little soul was first kindled at the sight of the heroic example of her patron saint, who, as a child, fled from her father's house to win the souls of the Moors for God. Teresa of Jesus, who was to make of Thérèse of Lisieux a charming miniature of herself, inspired her from her childhood with that love which, if it cannot give souls to God, will begin at least by giving God to souls. Thérèse in her good Catholic home was given an excellent religious education, and as rewards used to receive little gifts; but she wanted to share her happiness with the many poor and ignorant children of her own age who were in want of food for both body and soul. So, armed with her catechism, a few sweets, and some of her savings, she would collect a number of her poorer brethren and, while she distributed to them her little presents, she would speak to them about their souls and about heaven. It was a beautiful work to bring God's light to bear on these ignorant little creatures, but Thérèse was not satisfied. When she looked at her crucifix the wounds of our Lord

appeared to her as so many mouths which said plaintively to her: "I thirst—give me to drink."[1] These words, which seemed to echo through her being, filled her with an ardent desire to do something to save souls, and so quench our Lord's thirst. Thérèse was then thirteen years of age. This new desire decided the course which her future life was to take, so much so that she was wont to say that it marked the time of what she, in her humility, called her "conversion." Just then there occurred the fact to which she refers in her autobiography. She had seen it announced in the newspaper *La Croix* that sentence of death had been pronounced in Paris against a notorious French murderer, and she prayed earnestly for his repentance. Having reached the place of execution the miserable man was still impenitent and obstinate in his rejection of God's forgiveness. Through the unfailing weapon of prayer, Thérèse succeeded in obtaining at the very last the poor wretch's reconciliation, of which God gave her an exterior sign, and she sang her song of victory, calling, in her innocent language, this victim snatched from the hands of the evil one "her first spiritual son."

This—her first spiritual conquest—was never forgotten; even in Carmel, when her friends made her a present of some little offering, she would use it to have a Mass said for "her son,"

[1] *Story of a Soul,* chap. v.

" for," she said, " if I wrested his soul from hell it is also my duty to deliver him from Purgatory."[1] But she thirsted more and more to labour with greater intensity for the salvation of souls. She felt that, in order to gain them for God, one must give something besides fervent prayer. She must satisfy her great desires by dedicating herself without reserve to the work, and consecrate herself to God in an Order which had for its principal scope spiritual labour for souls. This was the first whisper of the mysterious voice which invited her to Carmel.

The secret desire which she had had from the age of three years, as she confessed to her bishop, of becoming a nun, from this time forward became a clear and decided voice calling her to Carmel; Carmel where life is one long act of divine love and of ceaseless immolation made to God for the growth of the Church and the salvation of souls. The sublime scheme of divine love and of charity for the neighbour, drawn up for the Carmelites by St Teresa, was the framework which suited perfectly the ideals and aspirations of the little girl: she did not hesitate for an instant to choose and prefer it to all other religious institutes. When she confided to her sister Céline the secret that she wished to become a Carmelite, she told her that it was with the sole desire of suffering more and of gaining a greater number of souls. She felt that it was harder for

[1] Deposition of Sister Geneviève of St Teresa.

nature, and for that reason more meritorious, to work without seeing the fruit of her labour, and to labour without encouragement or distraction of any sort. The most difficult and painful work is that which is undertaken in order to overcome oneself, and for this reason she longed for this life; by her desires she hastened the time of embracing it, and wanted at once to become a prisoner of Carmel in order to give to souls the beauty and happiness of heaven. And when God granted her wish, and she was able to enter Carmel, she solemnly declared her object: To pray for priests and for the Church. This sort of apostolate she called "wholesale trade," because "in reaching the head one reaches the members too."[1] She never took back this complete offering of herself, and a year before her death she wrote: "On September 8, 1890, a little Carmelite became the spouse of the King of Heaven, saying good-bye for ever to the world, with the one purpose of saving souls."[2] And so she became a Carmelite; but her thirst for souls continually tormented her. She said: "To be a Carmelite should be enough for me. None the less, other vocations make themselves felt. I feel called to the Priesthood and to the Apostolate. I would be a Martyr, a Doctor of the Church . . . the spirit of a Crusader burns within me, and I long to die on the field of battle

[1] Deposition of Sister Geneviève of St Teresa.
[2] *Ibid.*

in defence of holy Church. . . . O Jesus, like the Prophets and Doctors, I would be a light unto souls; I would travel to every land to preach thy Name, O my Beloved, and raise on heathen soil the glorious standard of thy Cross. . . . One mission alone would not satisfy my longings. I would spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth, even to the most distant isles. I would be a Missionary, not for a few years only, but, were it possible, from the beginning of the world till the consummation of time."[1]

These are her sublime thoughts, her bold desires which develop into actions productive of good. "Great deeds are not for me; I cannot preach the Gospel or shed my blood. No matter! My brothers work in my stead, and I, a little child, stay close to the throne, and love thee for all who are in the strife."[2]

To offer to God her love and her mortification for the apostolate of the priesthood, all her energies were directed to this one work which, in her poetic language, she calls "Scattering Flowers," and this is her song:

"To scatter flowers! behold my chosen sword
For saving sinners' souls and filling heaven's bowers;
The victory is mine—yea, I disarm thee, Lord,
With these my flowers!"[3]

With what care, what diligence, did she offer to God the flowers of her work, always joined to

[1] *Story of a Soul,* chap. xi. [2] *Ibid.*
[3] Poem "To Scatter Flowers."

prayer and suffering, especially those sufferings which she asked God to send her in expiation and reparation for obstinate sinners.

"The King of the country of the shining sun," she said, "came to live for thirty-three years in the land of darkness, and the darkness did not understand that this divine King was the Light of the world; but, O Lord, thy little child has known thy divine Light, and she begs pardon for her brothers. She is willing to eat the bread of sorrow for as long a time as thou willest to give it to her: she will not rise from the table set with bitterness, where poor sinners eat, until it pleases thee, solely that she may be able to say in her own name and in that of her brethren: 'Lord! have mercy on us, poor sinners, that the eyes of all those who have not seen the light of faith may at length be gladdened by its shining!'"[1]

"O Jesus, if it be necessary that thy banquet, profaned by sinners, be purified by the presence of one soul who loves thee, I alone will eat the bread of sorrow until the day when it shall please thee to receive me into the Kingdom of thy Light!"

So much for sinners. For the missionaries who are engaged in active labours for their conversion, she has other resources, other precious helps to give. She knows well that missionaries are soldiers exposed to privations and discomfort

[1] Deposition of Mother Agnes of Jesus.

of every kind. She knows that generous souls are often cast down by fatigue and depression, and that they need sustaining and encouraging to fresh labours, so God must be assailed on their behalf, for he alone can, by his grace and consolations, accomplish this work in the souls of his missioners. But in order infallibly to touch the Heart of God and force him to shower copious helps upon his apostles, one must have one's hands full of merits that he can take and pour out upon all those who are working for him. And so Thérèse expends all her energy on finding little things which will be precious for this purpose. During her last illness the infirmarian had advised her to take a walk in the garden for a quarter of an hour each day. This recommendation was for her a command. One afternoon a Sister, noticing what an effort it cost her, said: "Sœur Thérèse, you would do much better to rest: walking like this cannot do you any good. You only tire yourself." "That is true," she replied, "but do you know what gives me strength? I offer each step for some missionary. I think that possibly, over there, far away, one of them is weary and tired in his apostolic labours, and to lessen his fatigue I offer mine to the good God."[1]

Generous, heroic apostle of charity! You offer to God the flowers of your love at the very time when you are suffering most yourself, trying to

[1] *Story of a Soul,* chap. xii.

drag yourself along, and you think of your brother, some priest who, in his zeal for the salvation of souls, is worn out in body and soul, and whose steps flag upon the road of his missionary labours. You smile upon him and raise him up by means of the invisible help of your own sufferings, which surely in God's eyes are meritorious and efficacious.

Herein, what a great secret our little saint makes known to us! Here is a new and powerful means for helping our brethren, the missioners, and saving souls. Not all have purses in proportion to their charitable desires, not all are able to devote much time to prayer for missionaries, but apart from prayer or money we have all a great means, a coin which is of great value to God—our sufferings, our daily crosses. Here is another source of inexhaustible merit and help discovered for us by Thérèse: to suffer something for the love of missioners and the salvation of souls. There is no need to remind you of the thousand opportunities which present themselves in your daily lives of giving this precious alms. You know them better than I do. I am only pointing out to you how noble this generous action is; what a grand thing it is to hear someone say: I will suffer this pain for a missioner who is ill; I will put up with this annoyance for some tired missioner. I will bear this injury, I will lovingly accept this cross, for one who has to endure injuries, who is going through a

martyrdom of suffering! Which of us can refuse this alms, this act of charity to those who are spreading God's kingdom on earth? Let us also offer it, out of love and in imitation of this little saint. But Thérèse's charity towards the soldiers of Christ did not stop here. She, with all her family, had begged of God the grace to have a brother who would give his life to missionary labours, but the prayer had not been granted, so, making a virtue of necessity, she sought to form ties of spiritual relationship with some missioner for whom, without knowing or even having seen him, she offered her prayers and sacrifices, and to whom she delighted to send letters full of love and comfort and good counsel. "Let us work together," she wrote to one of them, "for the salvation of souls! We have but the day of this life to save them, and so give to our Lord a proof of our love."[1]

She had a particularly loving devotion to the young martyr Théophane Vénard, because his was a kindred soul; the bent of his mind, and his fervour and zeal being so like her own: she envied him his happy fate of shedding his blood for the faith of Christ. Her tender, delightful, inexhaustible love for missioners was very infectious, and she would use the most persuasive words, the most eloquent arguments, when speaking of them. To her sister Céline she wrote thus: "Why does Jesus deign to say: Pray ye the

[1] Letter II to her brother missionaries.

Lord of the Harvest that he send forth labourers? It is because his love for us is so unsearchable, so tender, that he wishes us to share in all he does."[1] And again she says: "Our vocation is not to go forth and reap in our Father's fields. Jesus does not say to us: Look down and reap the harvest; our mission is even more sublime. Lift up your eyes and see, saith our divine Master, see how in heaven there are empty thrones. It is for you to fill them . . . so ask me for labourers and they shall be sent. I only await a prayer, a sigh."[2] And she taught the method of collaboration with the labourers of the Gospel to fill heaven and make glad the Heart of our Lord. "By our little acts of charity, practised in times of darkness, let us convert souls from afar, let us help missioners and secure abundant alms for them that so we may raise both spiritual and material dwelling places for Jesus." Let us help the missioners, and so in a sense we shall be the mothers of the souls they save, and she wrote:

> "My Jesus! I who have no Spouse but thee.
> May yet, oh mystery, a mother be—
> Mother of souls—if I am one with thee.
> Lord of thy chosen who save souls for thee,
> Be mindful, O Belovèd."[3]

It was not enough for Thérèse's soul, inflamed by love, to sing:

[1] Letter XII to her sister Céline.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] Poem "Jesus Beloved, Remember."

"That I might win more souls for thee
To dwell in heaven eternally,
I came to Carmel, lovingly,
Remember, O Belovèd."[1]

Nor to protest:

"My God! I immolate myself to thee
That soon thy harvest gatherèd may be;
That all my joys and all my tears
Are for thy vineyard's labourers,
Remember, O Belovèd."[2]

But Thérèse declared: "Even in heaven my desires will be the same as those I had on earth; to love Jesus and to make him loved."[3]

To a life so beautiful, so generous, so short, yet so full of love and of great desires for the salvation of souls and the apostolate of priests, there could be but one end. The little victim offered in silence, and in her place of hiding, to the love of God, the rose whose petals were strewn beneath the bleeding Feet of Jesus, had a precious inheritance to bequeath to us, to the Church, to all who know something of our Lord's Passion and his thirst for the salvation of sinners. And she left it to us on her deathbed.

Her last words to the Mother Prioress were these: "Dear Mother, the chalice is full to overflowing! I could never have believed that it was possible to suffer so intensely . . . I can only explain it by my extreme desire to save

[1] Poem "Jesus Beloved, Remember." [2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Story of a Soul,* chap. xii.

souls."[1] Here we have her last will and testament, and the inheritance which she has left to us. Our duty is to accept it and make it widely known, in Thérèse's name, for the benefit of the apostles of Jesus Christ and the redemption of souls.

The teaching and the example of the Carmelite of Lisieux seem specially providential and helpful to-day when two Pontiffs, Benedict XV and Pius XI, have called upon the whole world to fulfil the noble duty of collaboration with Christ for the redemption of all who are living sunk in the darkness of error. The Missionary movement, which is everywhere making its wholesome influence felt to-day, was asking for a sign from heaven, a mark of encouragement from on high, and now God has glorified this little creature, one of the most apostolic souls of our times, and in her has given life to a form of apostolate easier, more accessible, and more suitable to the great majority of people. These, while remaining within their own social and domestic sphere, can and ought to associate themselves with the missionaries who, working directly for souls, realize the great fruit, both spiritual and material, which they derive from this individual apostolate. Whoever, therefore, loves God and desires to be specially loved by this sweet and wonderful saint must follow the example she has given. To imitate is one of the

[1] *Story of a Soul*, chap. xii.

most beautiful things that a loving heart can do. The lover longs to reproduce and to identify himself with the thoughts and actions of the beloved, and to-day we may well ask who is there who does not love Thérèse of the Child Jesus? Who is not touched at the sight of the charming art by which she has ravished heaven and won the hearts of men?

Who does not admire the marvellous abundance of graces which this little treasurer of God's Heart has showered upon the earth?

Let us then love and imitate her: it is our only means of honouring her. But we all know, and it is on this that I want most to insist, that Thérèse's beautiful soul was overflowing with the zeal and ardour and holy impatience of an apostle. She made use of all the riches and the merits of her soul to gain souls for God; to give all the helps possible in her state of life to the apostolate of the priesthood. Let us imitate her admirable activity. Let us work and give alms with Thérèse of the Child Jesus for this high purpose. Let us make use of all that God has given us. Let us give all that we have of the best: spiritual helps before all others; prayer, good works, mortification, trials offered and suffered for those who are labouring in the Vineyard of the Lord.

And let each one according to his means also give material help. This is as necessary as the other, because, while spiritual help obtains for

the missioners that mysterious increase without which, according to St Paul, men sow and water in vain, material aid is the means by which good works are established, carried on, and rendered lasting. The missionaries are the poorest of the poor, for they are in want of all things; not for themselves, but in order that they may rescue souls from sin and error, and help them to persevere in the faith and in the grace of God.

From the Church to the school and the hospital; from bread and clothes to medicine—there is no demand that is not made on the missioner, every want needs supplying, that so he may be able to feed, to develop, to bring souls to perfection, as God shall inspire. So let us give generously with the sole object of glorifying God, redeeming souls, and giving joy to the heart of our little Patron; remembering that all will be recorded in the Book of Life; and she who so loves souls will reward us a hundredfold for all that we give, by those mystical roses promised to those who collaborate with her in her work and her apostolate, of making her Lord and ours known and loved.

Generous little soldier of Christ, tireless labourer, glorious co-operator with Christ in the Redemption, hearing the cry of thy Spouse thirsting for souls, in an ecstasy of love you endeavoured to assuage that divine thirst. You who purchased for him by your charity, your prayers, and your sacrifices an infinite number

of souls, grant that we also may give ourselves with passionate devotion to this sublime apostolate.

By your admirable example you discovered to souls an immense field of labour wherein we may all, even while remaining at the post God has assigned to us, labour fruitfully for the salvation of souls; obtain, then, for us the honour of being allowed to enter this field, there to work by your side.

St Thérèse of the Child Jesus, guardian angel of the priests of God, do not cease to work for them in heaven. Beg of the Lord of the Harvest that he will send forth labourers to gather the harvest, which, for want of apostles, is left to die upon the fields.

Smile upon them, comfort them, defend them by your powerful patronage, sanctify them by your sweet example,

Herald of the divine Mercy to sinners, save all souls by your intercession, fill heaven with the elect, that with you and for you they may "sing for ever of the mercies of the Lord."

SERMON V

THE MERIT OF ST THÉRÈSE

"Quasi rosa." ("Like a rose.")—Eccl.

The story of Saint Thérèse might be compared to that of a rose, which has but three short stages —the opening of the bud in the hot-house, the transplanting to the garden, and then the flower come to its full beauty, adorning the altar. Here we have an image of Thérèse in her home, in Carmel, and in heaven.

The rose is the most beautiful of all flowers. The colours of its petals, delicate as those of a miniature, seem made of a many-coloured light, and it exhales a most exquisite scent, yet, when the petals drop, among the green leaves sharp thorns are revealed.

Why should there be suffering hidden beneath such dazzling beauty? This is the profound mystery of human things; a mystery known only to God who mingles pain with all lovely things here below. It was so with Saint Thérèse. She was like a rose whose beauty and perfume we enjoy without ever suspecting the presence of thorns, and yet there were sharp and painful thorns, and the more numerous they were the more radiant she appeared.

A Sister remarked to her one day: "It is said that you have never suffered much." Smiling, she pointed to a glass containing medicine of a bright red colour. "You see this little glass," she said, "one would suppose that it contained a most delicious draught, whereas, in reality, it is more bitter than anything else I take. It is the image of my life. To others it has been all rose-colour: they have thought that I drank continually of a most delicious wine, yet to me it has been full of bitterness."[1]

And so it ever is. The twelfth chapter of *The Story of a Soul* opens with these words: "Many pages of this story will never be read upon earth." She is speaking of the pages of her sufferings. Is there one of us to-day to whom the delightful picture of the Carmelite of Lisieux is not familiar? Yet there are few, if any, who know her completely. All picture her as a child who ran, singing, on her way to heaven along the easiest, straightest, and happiest road. But it was not so. Thérèse had to earn her shining crown; she purchased it and fashioned it gem by gem. I would go further and say that even if Thérèse had not lived her life of spiritual childhood she would have had another claim to heaven; I mean that of her sufferings; her hidden martyrdom borne secretly in mind and body, in heart and in soul, with the courage and generosity of a martyr. She wished to be a

[1] *Story of a Soul*, chap. xii.

Carmelite, and a very perfect one; one of those who belong to the Carmel of Teresa of Jesus and of John of the Cross, two daring souls who thirsted for suffering. She took for her name Thérèse of the Child Jesus because she was in love with Bethlehem and Nazareth, and she called herself also Thérèse of the Holy Face, because she was espoused to one who had shed his Blood for her, because she was enamoured of that Face disfigured by tears and by suffering.

Let us not shrink from thinking of her thus. Let us not fear. I assure you, and I think you will agree with me, that Thérèse of the Holy Face is as beautiful and attractive as Thérèse of the holy Child Jesus; she is a rose; *quasi rosa,* as St Gregory would say, *suavis sed armata, odorifera quia spinifera.*

The time of her exile was short, and so her tears were few, but they were the burning, bitter tears of a secret, unknown martyrdom.

Speak to us, little Thérèse, sing to us, you who know so well how to gladden dark hours by the sweetness of song. Hidden in the rock of Carmel, sing to us of love, and pour out upon us the sufferings of your crucified heart: *Sonet vox tua* ("Let your voice be heard") for our need of consolation, of encouragement, is great.

* * * * *

"To live by love," said St Thérèse, "is not

to ascend Thabor but Calvary, and to lay hold of the Cross as of a treasure."

These words contain the essence of Christian perfection.

Love desires to resemble the Beloved, and tends to develop more and more the divine Likeness. *Amor aut similem invenit, aut similem facit.*

Now, all our Lord's life, that life which is both the object and the subject of all holiness, resolves itself into three parts, corresponding to the three stages of Christian perfection—the Hidden Life, the Public Life, and the Passion.

Almost all the saints have trodden these three ways, but certainly that of Calvary none may miss.

Thérèse of the Child Jesus trod all these roads, but she lingered along that of childhood, for it was more than a school for her soul, it was its heaven. The years of her apostolate were spent in Carmel, where she accomplished great works by means of her prayers and sacrifices. The way of the Cross alone she would seem to some to have missed, yet, in reality, it was marked by drops of her blood.

For we must notice that as a result of her study of perfection, she had learnt the art of hiding her sufferings under the charming smile of her spiritual childhood, of veiling them under cover of ordinary and commonplace things. Yet, beneath her smiles all her suffering lay con-

cealed. Undoubtedly God did not give her the bitter, violent sufferings inflicted by ill-will or enmity, for children cannot have enemies. He sheltered this little flower from the fierce hatred of persecution; her Calvary was in the very depths of her heart and soul; but is not secret anguish often equal to the suffering of hatred, of calumny, of persecution? Suffering is not always objective, nor to be measured by sighs and tears, for these may even bring relief; but suffering worthy of the name is to be gauged by the depth of the heart, the breadth of the soul, the refinement of the feelings. A coarse-grained nature, a vulgar mind, has no conception of the interior sufferings which are like the agony of death to a sensitive and affectionate heart. The cry of our Lord in the garden, *Tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem*,[1] shows us the weight of certain intimate sufferings powerful enough to crush the very soul.

This was Thérèse's martyrdom. She was richly endowed with the gifts of nature, but the greatest of these were her extreme sensitiveness, her refined feelings, and her affectionate heart. Every circumstance of her life contributed to this —her family, her education, her studies, and, above all, her wonderful intuition of the things of God. There was nothing which escaped her notice, the hidden meaning of a word, the severity of a look, the sweetness of a smile, the

[1] Matt. xxvi, 38.

feeling of joy or of pain, resulting from a pleasure or a sorrow, all found an echo in her heart and in her soul.

We must, therefore, bear in mind her very exceptional nature when we consider the pain she was called upon to bear.

She suffered from the very moment of her birth. I am not exaggerating; I am quoting her own words: "The cross has been with me from the cradle, but for that cross God has given me a passionate love."[1]

Thérèse was born in the depths of a cold, grey winter. All was joy at first, but soon the tender bud drooped upon its stem: little hope was held out, it must wither and die. But the child was sent into the country; the little rose-bud revived, and after some months grew strong enough to allow of its being brought back to Alençon.[2]

Thérèse had a wonderful memory, and has given us a faithful account of the smallest details of her childhood from the age of three. She says: "My soul was refined in the crucible of exterior and interior trials; now like a flower after the storm I can raise my head"—it was to be but for a short time.[3]

She was barely four years old when she realized that her road to heaven was to be one of sacrifice.

[1] Letter IX to Missioners.
[2] Fr. Taylor, *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux.*
[3] *Story of a Soul,* chap. ii.

One recalls the time when Léonie offered some toys to her little sisters to choose from, and how Thérèse eagerly said: "I choose everything." "This childish incident," she reflected, "was a forecast, so to speak, of my whole life. Because hardly had I understood that in order to become a saint one must suffer, than I cried out: 'My God, I choose everything, I will not be a saint by halves, I am not afraid of suffering for thee, I only fear one thing, and that is to do my own will. Accept the offering of my will, for I choose all thou willest.'"[1]

Brave child! You want to become a saint! You choose whatever God shall choose. You know not what you ask, for God ever chooses the cross for his saints. You desire, then, the cross, the embrace of the Crucified! "My God, give me martyrdom of soul or body . . . or rather give me both the one and the other."[2]

And God was to grant her prayer.

Thérèse remembered her mother's last illness, when a friend used to come to fetch her away from the house in order to take her home with her and to try to distract her. She remembered the ceremony of Extreme Unction, and could ever after hear, in her heart, her poor father's heartbroken sobs. She recalled the last scene of that day of mourning when her father said, "Come and kiss your mother for the last time,"

[1] *Story of a Soul*, chap. i.
[2] *Ibid.*, chap. xii.

and she saw her mother, her guardian angel, lying there stiff and cold.

Poor little Thérèse, how early was that void, which can never be filled, made in your heart! Never more will you feel your mother's gentle caresses, nor see her sweet smile, nor hear her angelic voice teaching you to pray. Never again, for death has taken her from you—at four and a half.

One sorrow followed another.

Thérèse's family was obliged to leave Alençon. The change of house at the time did not make too painful an impression upon the child herself, but when she recalls the event she remembers the sorrow that was all around her. Her father, heartbroken at being separated from all his friends and all his interests; the five motherless children in their mourning dresses following him and suffering for him—and so they bade farewell to Alençon, which, on a grey winter's day, had seen the opening of the "Little Flower"; to the beautiful cathedral of Notre Dame, where the waters of baptism had flowed over her soul; to the little white house in the Rue St Blaise, which had echoed to the sound of her voice; to the graveyard where they had left their hearts with the beloved mother.

Madame Martin's death, with all its sad consequences, made a lasting impression upon Thérèse's mind and heart, and upon her whole life; her naturally happy disposition was

changed, she became timid, shy, extremely sensitive, easily moved to tears. God is beginning to work in her soul : it has received the first embrace of the Crucified, and we must not be astonished, for God often deals thus from childhood with the souls of those he loves. He is an Artist who must needs make use of the chisel when creating a masterpiece, hammering continuously, painfully, at the hardness and waywardness of our weak human nature in order to carve therein the heavenly image which is to adorn its immortal temple.

And Thérèse, who was so soon to rejoice in heaven and to be raised to the Altars of the Church, was to devote herself assiduously to the work of imitating, as closely as possible, her suffering and glorious Model, Jesus Christ Crucified.

It was at Lisieux, when Thérèse was seven years old, that God showed her how her father was to die.

She worshipped her father, and he was worthy of her love. She would have preferred a thousand times to die before him, but this was not to be. She was to outlive him and she foresaw his suffering end. One day she was at a window overlooking the garden when, at the end of the path, she saw a man dressed exactly like her father, of the same height and appearance, but very bent and old, and with his head covered by a thick veil. Terrified, the child called "Papa, papa,"

but in vain. He seemed not to hear, and did not answer. The mysterious person, with measured step, disappeared down one of the garden walks.[1] One day her father was to be overcome by a humiliating malady, which by slow steps was to carry him, her "king," to the grave, and she from that day knew it in her heart, by more than a presentiment, for with terrible certainty God had shown it to her.

Time passes, and the chisel of the divine Sculptor continues the sanctifying work of suffering. There were soon to be other vacant places in her home. Pauline, her second mother, left them to become a Carmelite. "Life is full of sorrowful partings," Thérèse said; "I was so weak that I look on it as a miracle that I was able to bear such a trial and yet live."[2] "Pauline is lost to me."[3] She had been accustomed to talk to her of all that was in her heart, and now that this loved sister had entered Carmel she could hardly snatch two or three minutes alone with her.

The separation and suffering so affected her delicate health that she fell seriously ill of a malady which was to bring her to death's door. The doctors could not fathom the nature of the disease. Her sisters nursed her devotedly but in vain, for Thérèse's sickness was of the soul rather than the body. The little flower faded and

[1] *Story of a Soul,* chap. ii. [2] *Ibid.*, chap. iii.
[3] *Ibid.*

drooped, but did not die. God preserved her; she had only reached the foot of Calvary, and had yet to make the painful ascent and to die crucified with our Lord. On the day of her First Communion she enjoyed a little sweetness and consolation; a rest along the way of the cross to prepare her for greater labours; it was the eve of a more painful struggle.

I am well aware that I have undertaken too difficult a task. How is it possible to describe the sufferings which are about to begin for Thérèse?

Words are too cold and inadequate a medium by which to represent the martyrdom of this soul who, in her strivings after God, sees her way barred, her flight impeded. These are some of the pages of her life which she said should never be read. For, indeed, what Thérèse has suffered up to this time is very little compared with what is awaiting her. Until now her sufferings have been the natural result of home-sickness and of human love, the love of her mother and father and sisters, but now that she has heard God's voice clearly and unmistakably her martyrdom rises to an immeasurable height, because he for whom she suffers is infinite.

God undoubtedly was calling her, yet all those who surrounded her, and, be it noted, all very good people, let it be plainly seen that they thought it impossible and absurd. The strongest argument against her was her youth, it was all a childish fancy.

Thérèse, from the age of three, as she told the Bishop of Bayeux, had been conscious of her vocation to the religious life. Now she could hear the divine Voice clearly calling her, urging her to enter Carmel, but three sisters had preceded her into religion; her father had placed all his hopes in her, the last ray of sunshine in his old age; her uncle, her mother's brother, was absolutely opposed to her vocation; the Bishop was undecided and referred the matter to his delegate, who replied by a decisive refusal; the Carmelites, who had already accepted two of Thérèse's sisters, would not think of receiving a third. How contrary to her dream was all this opposition. Poor child! opposed on all sides—where could she turn for encouragement in the fulfilment of her project?

At length she spoke to her father on the eve of Pentecost, and he, like a saint, pronounced his *fiat*. Her uncle, as though by magic, changed his mind; but the rest remained inflexible. She was taken to Rome in order to distract her thoughts, but there all the beauty and the charm of Italy did but speak to her heart of the grandeur of him to whom it was given, and intensified her desire of going to live for ever in Carmel. Emboldened by the strength of her desire she, at an audience with the Pope, ventured to speak to him, to beg him to grant her wish, but his answer was indecisive—in no way corresponding with the urgency of the Voice of Jesus.

She returned to France brokenhearted and exhausted by her prayers and tears. All creatures seemed against her. At last, after an heroic exercise of confidence in God, after a series of refusals, of contradictions, and of troubles, Christ Crucified took her to his Heart, and in a wonderful manner the doors of Carmel were opened to her. Yet, before she was to be the spouse of Christ, there were still many humiliations, much delay, much giving up of her own will in store for her.

On the day of her Clothing, arrayed in her beautiful white dress, her golden hair covering her like a veil, and wearing a crown of lilies and roses, she knelt at the threshold of the convent in presence of the Bishop and of her religious Sisters to receive her father's blessing. The knowledge of his suffering inflicted a double wound upon her heart, that of her own sacrifice and of his who silently yielded up his every right before the claims of God.

So with a bleeding heart Thérèse offered herself to her divine Spouse to receive the gifts of his Love.

A bundle of myrrh, a naked cross, these were her bridal gifts, and the words "for ever" seemed to echo through the convent walls. Thérèse clasped the crucifix to her breast and uttered her cry of love: "To be for ever alone with thee, to suffer martyrdom for thee! O my divine Spouse, how sweet it is to die for thee and

for my brethren. Grant that through my sufferings sinners may be brought back to thee. May I weep and suffer for them, and offer myself as a holocaust for them to thee. May thy kiss be to me the warrant of what I ask of thee."[1]

This was the Nuptial Hymn which she sang in her heart given over to Christ, and he, her Spouse, bending down to her from his cross embraced her soul and left therein the thorns wherewith his Head is crowned. Then a tempest rose within and around her.

"Suffering," she says, "opened its arms to me on my first entrance into Carmel, and I embraced it lovingly, for to suffer is my vocation."[2] Jesus led her into the shadow of the cross and unveiled to her the mystery of suffering and contempt hidden in his adorable Face, and Thérèse discovered that therein lies an abyss of joy. She says:

"I know a source where they that drink shall yet thirst . . . that source is the suffering known to Jesus only."[3]

Hardly had she entered Carmel than there began for her that agony of the spirit, that great aridity, which was proportioned to the eager longing of her soul for suffering. Her divine Spouse seemed, indeed, to have forsaken her.

[1] P. Giuseppi Manni, *Sister Thérèse.*
[2] *Story of a Soul,* chap. vii.
[3] Letter II. to Sister Mary of the Sacred Heart.

"Jesus was asleep in my boat,"[1] she said, and Satan profited by this time of desolation to draw near and to tempt her.

But what temptation could seize upon that angelic soul living ever and only for God, to whom she has generously immolated herself anew? Where could temptation find an entrance into a heart already steeped in suffering? Yet Satan did come to her, proud, cruel, jealous, and full of hatred for one who was to be as a torch lighting up the road to heaven, a voice calling back millions of sinners from the gates of hell: this gentle child who would speak to all discouraged hearts of the tenderness of the divine mercy, and would teach souls how they might make use of their very lowliness and misery as a means by which to raise themselves to the heights of eternal glory. What a victory for the powers of hell if he should conquer this rival, so strong in her weakness! He sets to work. On the eve of her Profession, when she was about to ratify for all eternity her espousals with God, she was plunged in an abyss of darkness—the fervour of her longing desires, her delight in prayer, her vivid realization of the presence of the Beloved of her soul, all deserted her. All was cold and dark around her. And in this darkness Satan drew nigh to her as he did to Christ in the shades of Gethsemani and thrust a terrible doubt, like the icy blade of a knife, into her heart. The Evil

[1] *Story of a Soul*, chap. viii.

One tried to persuade her that she had made a mistake in entering Carmel, that she had acted hastily and without sufficient reflection; that even strong people were not always able to endure the Carmelites' austere and penitential life. How then could a delicate girl like herself hope to succeed in it? The prayer and watching and fasting would be far beyond her strength, and, this being so, she was committing suicide in trying to live this life, and when it was over she would lose her soul. Then he suggested that there was still time—it was not yet too late to give it all up and to return to her aged father who needed her so much. Certainly Carmel was not for her.

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The mystical night of the soul was descending upon her, the darkness of Gethsemani was all around, hiding all things from her. It was her agony in the garden.

Yet in this martyrdom of soul Thérèse found strength to sing with the poet of the cross the canticle of the Wounded Heart: "Where, O Lord, dost thou hide thyself?" and a ray of light from heaven rent the thick veil of darkness: Thérèse suddenly felt inspired to make known the temptation to her Novice Mistress, and Satan fled before this act of confidence and humility.

Thérèse's Profession Day was spent in perfect peace, but with renewal of strength came fresh suffering, and the ceremony of receiving the veil,

which took place a fortnight later, was, she says, a feast "veiled in tears." Her father was too ill to come and bless his "little queen." "Jesus is a Spouse of blood," she wrote to her sister Céline. "He wishes for himself all the blood of our hearts."[1]

"What a wound I have received! And yet I feel it is inflicted by a loving Hand, by a Hand divinely jealous."[2] "My little sister," she wrote again, "all was ready for my espousals, but something was still wanting for the feast . . . a jewel of incomparable beauty was missing; this Jesus had given me to-day. Papa is ill and will not be here to-morrow. Céline, I confess that I have cried bitterly . . . I am still crying so that I can scarcely hold my pen . . . Jesus wishes me to be an orphan . . . to be alone with him, alone. . . . This day's trial is one of those sorrows that are difficult to understand."

Her father's illness lasted four years, and then death came to end it. On one of his last days on earth he was carried to the convent parlour to visit his daughters for the last time, and through the grille Thérèse recognized him as she had seen him when she was only seven years old in the garden at home, bowed down by suffering.

God had kept his word.

Poor little girl! God asked of you the very hardest sacrifice you could make to him, and you

[1] Letter IV to Céline.
[2] Letter IX to Céline.

offered it to him with every fibre of your being. On the day when you saw your father for the last time you said to him with tender anxiety: "We shall meet again," but he, with tears in his eyes answered: "In heaven." Thérèse's nearest relations were now all either in heaven or in the convent, for after her father's death Céline, the only sister left in the world, joined her in Carmel.

Many may have thought that the fact of three of her sisters being in the convent would have been a source of happiness for Thérèse, but, on the contrary, their companionship was but a source of suffering of a most subtle kind. The mortified child looked upon it as a duty to go against her feelings and to ignore the claims of blood relationship. Closely united by nature, they were more closely united by grace. Their deep mutual affection was made holy by the high aspirations they had in common and their vocation to the same religious Order.

She loved Pauline, especially, with a love akin to that of a child for its mother, for from the time Thérèse was four years old it was she who had been her "little mother," and had trained her to offer acts of self-denial to Jesus; who, every evening on putting her to bed, would give her the comforting assurance that "he was pleased with her, and that the golden-winged angels would be round her bed." As she held the office of Prioress, God willed that this beloved

sister should continue her maternal relations to-towards Thérèse, and it would be hard to exaggerate how strongly Thérèse's affectionate nature was drawn to see her, and speak to her, and enjoy her company; yet, fearing that this attraction was merely natural, she fought against the longings of her heart by avoiding meeting her.

Sometimes the heroic child would find that duty or necessity or her Office brought her to the Prioress' door, and then she would "hurry past and hold on to the banisters to keep herself from turning back."[1]

We have seen something of the martyrdom of her heart and of her soul and of her feelings—it remains to speak of the martyrdom of her body—frail as a delicate flower.

An enemy had begun to attack the beautiful temple in which her pure soul dwelt; an enemy in the shape of a mortal sickness similar to that of other penitent and angelic saints, Aloysius Gonzaga, John Berchmans, Gabriele dell' Addolorata. During the bright days of spring, Thérèse had seemed quite well and strong, but with the chilly autumn weather, the first signs of the enemy appeared and refused to yield to treatment. On the night of Holy Thursday, 1896, Thérèse received the first warning. Delighted she went to the Prioress to tell her that she had heard "the first call of her Beloved, heralding

[1] *Story of a Soul*, chap. ix.

his joyful approach."[1] But he was not to come for eighteen more months, which, in the suffering they represented, might have been eighteen years. For it would seem that all the sufferings she had undergone in her life filled the chalice of her soul to overflowing when she came to die—desolation, darkness, doubt, the sense of abandonment—temptation while her body was racked by weakness, fever, and thirst.

Worn out by fever and suffering from violent headaches, Thérèse continued as long as possible to follow the life of the Community.

To obey the orders of the Infirmarian she used to walk in the garden when hardly able to drag herself along, supported by the thought that she was "walking for a missionary." At length she was forced to keep to her bed. During the long nights she spent awake and in pain she was glad to be alone in her cell where no one could hear her cough. "I want to suffer alone," she said; "as soon as I am pitied, my happiness leaves me."[2]

Soon to her bodily sufferings was added the terrible torment of doubt as to her salvation. "Are you certain God loves you?" the voice of the Evil One said to her. "Has he himself told you so?"[3]

In the month of July, 1897, she became so much worse that the doctor ordered her to be

[1] *Story of a Soul,* chap. xii. [2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*

removed to the infirmary. On leaving her cell she looked round her sadly and said: "I have suffered so much here and I should have been happy to die here."[1]

On July 16, feast of our Lady of Mount Carmel, she received holy Viaticum, and on the thirtieth of the same month she was anointed. All then thought that death was near, though, in reality, she had two more months to live. Two more months of martyrdom, deprived, because of her continual sickness, of Holy Communion, during which time Satan redoubled his efforts to disturb her peace and cause her to be anxious, fearful, and troubled by doubts against faith, that faith on which, since her childhood, her soul had lived; the faith which was in her blood and was part of her very being. "You dream of a land of light and fragrance," the mocking voice of the devil said to her; "you think one day to escape from these mists where you now languish. Nay, rejoice in death, which will give you, not what you hope for, but a night darker still, the night of utter nothingness."[2] "Oh, pray for the agonizing," Thérèse kept repeating. "Oh! if you only knew how necessary it is to pray for them. If you only knew!" And, looking at the sky and smiling, she said: "I am admiring the beauty of the material heaven—because the true heaven seems closed against me."

No ray of light relieved her agony. The tide

[1] *Story of a Soul,* chap. xii. [2] *Ibid.*

of suffering rose higher and higher, and she became so weak that she was unable to make the slightest movement without assistance. The least noise increased her suffering, and from time to time she was seized by strange fits of trembling. Sometimes her face, beautiful still despite its pallor, would cloud over and appear as though veiled. At length, just before the end came, she sat up and exclaimed: "The chalice is full to overflowing. I could never have believed that it was possible to suffer so intensely."[1]

Lord, have pity on her! On the innocent victim who has loved thee so much and has so greatly suffered! Let one ray of light shine upon her from heaven's gates to show her thou art near. No! she is the spouse of the Crucified and has begged for his close embrace, even in his abandonment upon the cross. And so it was. Then she made one supreme effort. The sweat of death lay heavy on her brow—she was trembling from head to foot, but, clasping her crucifix to her breast, she put forth all her strength to reach the harbour of her soul.

Completely given over to suffering, she fixed her eyes upon the statue of Mary, Star of the Sea, then, looking at her crucifix, she cried, "Oh! . . . I love him . . . My God, I . . . love . . . thee!" and her soul was borne away to heaven.

The convent bells rang the Angelus. At last,

[1] *Story of a Soul,* chap. xii.

after twenty-four years of suffering, the soul of the little victim of love rested in peace. The bells seemed like the voice of God calling to her: "Come, spouse from Libanus, come! Thou hast wounded me with thy love and with thy suffering, come that I may crown thee—I, thy God, am thy rest, thy joy, thine eternal glory!"

* * * * *

Let us gather up with all reverence the most precious lessons of the little Martyr of Suffering.

Let us confess the truth, her example makes us shudder. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, a mere child, had a genius for suffering, and we, so frightened of suffering and so eager for enjoyment, cannot understand her, and rebel at the thought of living a life like hers. And yet we need to understand and to live her life, for it is our portion here below, given us by God for our sanctification and salvation.

Thérèse understood it and lived it with passionate devotion. She begged for suffering as a reward, looked forward to it, and, when it came, embraced it with joy. Hers was an agony suffered in the secret depths of the heart; a martyrdom, daily renewed, in which she shed her blood drop by drop, and during the course of which joy seldom came to give her relief. Yet in this agony she sang! What a wonderful thing it is that, spent by suffering of every kind, she yet could smile and raise her voice in song. It was

because her pain was love for God, and the intoxicating power of divine Love can transform earth into heaven. So she sang to the very end, and, when upon her deathbed she clasped her crucifix and uttered her cry of agony, it was still the same supreme song of love: "I did not think it was possible to suffer so much! . . . My God, I love thee! . . ."

This was her last song, and it is thus that we must think of dear Thérèse of the Child Jesus, the real Thérèse, holding her crucifix, wreathed in roses, in her hands. Thus we must love and imitate her who, because of her martyrdom of love, is ranked among the great ones of the Church.

Little Sister of all who are in exile and struggling to win heaven, we love you and we pray to you. You asked of God to make you like unto himself at all costs, even that of never tasting here below the sweetness of his presence, and he answered your prayer by imprinting his likeness upon your heart.

Forgive us for venturing to read these secret pages of your life, but we, who are suffering sorely, need to know you, and to learn from you the art of hiding pain beneath a smile of love.

Rose, whose petals were scattered upon the road to Calvary and beneath the bleeding Feet of Jesus, but which has blossomed anew in the eternal springtime, have pity upon all suffering souls.

Cry to all of us who weep, that even we, like you, like all the saints, like our Lord himself, shall one day be there where is joy and rest, ascending by the cross to light—*Per Crucem ad lucem!*

SERMON VI

A SHORT SERMON BEFORE HOLY COMMUNION IN HONOUR OF ST THÉRÈSE

" Delight of the elect, Eternal King, a narrow host is thy dwelling-place. Thus do I wish to hide myself for thee."—St Thérèse of the Child Jesus.

"Thou who knowest well my nothingness, O God—thou dost not fear to lower thyself even to me. . . . Adorable Sacrament, O come into my heart, which longs for thee."[1]

This cry of love to God was wrung from the heart of Thérèse of the Child Jesus during the night of agony which preceded her last Communion. And, while the holy Viaticum was being carried to her along a way strewn with wild flowers and rose-petals—living symbols of her own sacrifice now at length consummated—she repeated in the inmost depths of her heart :

" Would that of thy goodness, sweet Saviour, I might after this Communion die of love. Hear the cry of my longing desire. . . . Come into my heart."[2]

Thérèse was indeed spent with love.

Ever since the day of her First Communion, when our Lord's first kiss had been imprinted

[1] *Story of a Soul,* chap. xii. [2] *Ibid.*

upon her soul, she had been lost in him as a drop of water is lost in the ocean. From her earliest years she had longed to quench her thirst at the source of all virtue, of all perfection, of all devotion—the Holy Eucharist. She had been quick to understand that Holy Communion alone could perfect and consummate her life of love, a life of the closest union of body, heart, and soul with our Lord himself in the Blessed Sacrament. Thérèse had grasped the great mystery of the Eucharistic life of her Lover, which, reproduced in her own life, would raise her to the height of her perfection, to the summit of her love, and therefore it was that she prayed to her Beloved: "Delight of the elect, eternal King—a narrow host is thy dwelling-place—thus do I wish to hide myself for thee." And with what perfect art did she reproduce the Eucharistic life of Jesus. Pure and humble she was as a victim offered to the merciful love of God for love of her brethren; and the rays of the Eucharistic virtues formed a halo round her soul. The simplicity of our Lord's life in the Tabernacle became the exemplar which she tried to keep before her in her humble everyday life.

The silence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament was the model of the silent eloquence of her soul which passed through this world always creating an atmosphere of silence around it.

With the humility of our Lord in the Holy Eucharist, Thérèse was passionately in love, for

though sunk in the depths of her own nothingness, yet she seemed ever to rejoice in her self-annihilation. The obedience, the docility, the patience of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament were to her as hidden springs at which she might daily quench her thirst. Despoiled of her own will, she hungered for sufferings which were hidden from others and known only to our Lord himself, and as she contemplated the abyss of pain hidden deep in the Heart of her Spouse she learnt from him to suffer for his love. The munificent generosity of her Eucharistic Lord, who gives himself to all for their delight and benediction, was prodigal in its gifts to the little victim who, forgetful of herself, poured out the treasures of her mind and of her heart for the salvation of sinners. "Thus, thus will I hide myself for thee!" and oh, the wonder of the Eucharistic glory renewed in the glory of little Thérèse! The Holy Eucharist, the mystery of love beneath which a God is hidden and annihilated, is also the centre of hearts, the food of souls, and the sunshine of our supernatural life. The Eucharist is the banquet which draws all those hearts that are thirsting for love, hungering for all that is right and good. And, similarly, in St Thérèse's hidden life what beauty there is, what attractive virtue!

Love completed the wonder. The little Carmelite of Lisieux, the humble victim enriched with all the splendours of the Eucharistic

virtues, is that shining star which but lately appeared in the heavens of the Church, and all souls are praying that its rays may shine upon them and illumine their way.

Thérèse is to-day a powerful centre of attraction towards whom all who wish to emulate the angels and live really holy lives are irresistibly drawn. Thérèse's secret, the mystery of her great sanctity and glory, is *here;* living, breathing, upon this Altar. This small host, "Delight of the elect," this adorable Sacrament which she daily, hourly, reproduced in her own life—this bread of angels, with all its unspeakable virtues, is the explanation of her heroism; this was the home of her love, this the secret of her glory.

And to-day you are all drawing nigh to this same table to receive this same Bread in her honour.

My brethren, learn to find in this divine Food the virtue, the heroism, the love, which she found. Remember *soror nostra est!* Thérèse is our sister, child of the same Father, nourished with the same food, a guest like ourselves at the same table, living by the same bread of sorrow, suffering the same pain, the same weariness as we ourselves. Here, at this banquet of life, we are sustained, we are strengthened, we are filled, and we live. Here let us come for refreshment, for strength, and here let us cry with her: "Delight of the elect, eternal King, a narrow

host is thy dwelling-place. So will I hide myself for thee."

For this is our desire too—with thee and for thee, O beloved Jesus, hidden in this small tabernacle, we would live thy life of humility, of simplicity, of silence, of obedience, of sweetness, of patience, of generosity—certain thou wilt one day receive us into thy joy and thy glory; the glory and the joy of our little sister, with whom each one of us in this Communion, this fleeting foretaste of heaven, prays to thee:

"Adorable Sacrament! O come into my heart —my heart which longs for thee."

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